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THE NEW YORKER

JULY 6 & 13, 2009

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THE NEW YORKER

JULY 6 & 13, 2009

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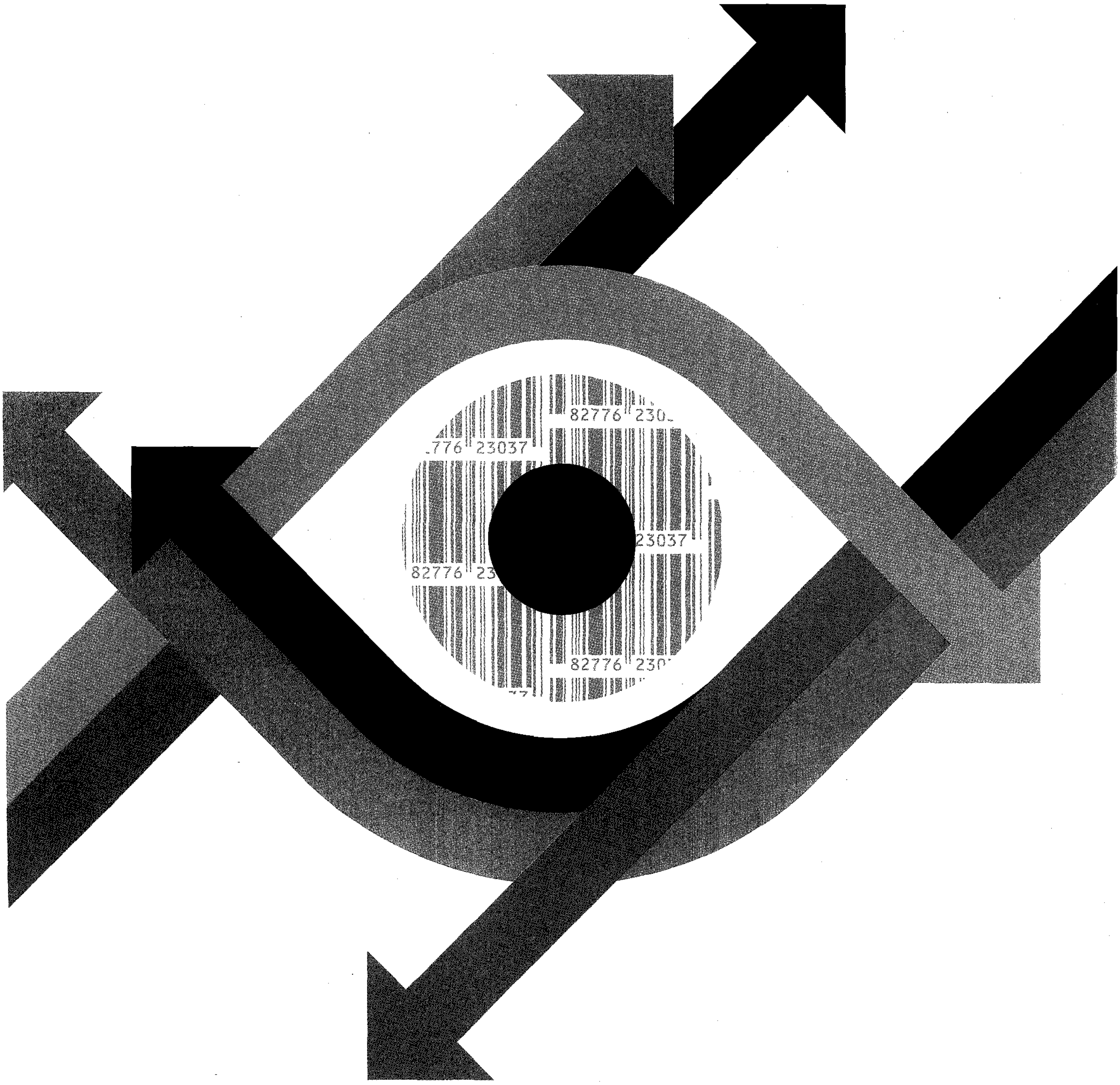

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CONTRIBUTORS

Ryan Lizza ("The Contrarian," p. 30) is the magazine's Washington correspondent.

Hendrik Hertzberg (Comment, p. 23) writes frequently about politics and policy. He also writes a blog on newyorker.com.

Kelefa Sanneh (The Talk of the Town, p. 26) is a staff writer.

Robert Risko (Illustrations, pp. 23, 26, 92), an artist and caricaturist, has contributed to the magazine since 1991.

Yoni Brenner (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 38) was a writer on the movie "Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs," which is coming out this week.

Carol Muske-Dukes (Poem, p. 56), who teaches at the University of Southern California, was recently appointed Poet Laureate of California. Her most recent novel is "Channeling Mark Twain."

James Surowiecki (The Financial Page, p. 28) covers economic and business affairs in his column.

Mark Ulriksen (Cover), a regular contributor of cover art, has illustrated two children's books, "Dog Show" and "The Biggest Parade."

Raffi Khatchadourian ("The Kill Company," p. 40) started writing for *The New Yorker* in 2007.

Ariel Levy ("Nora Knows What to Do," p. 60) is a staff writer.

Lorrie Moore (Fiction, p. 70) has a new novel, "A Gate at the Stairs," coming out in September.

Malcolm Gladwell (Books, p. 80) is the author of three books, including "Outliers: The Story of Success."

Richard McGuire (Illustration, p. 81) will begin a fellowship at the Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers, at the New York Public Library, in September.

Jorge Luis Borges (Poem, p. 82) was born in Argentina in 1899 and died in Switzerland in 1986. Two collections of his poetry, "The Sonnets" and "Poems of the Night," which contain many poems translated into English for the first time, will be published next spring.

Nancy Franklin (On Television, p. 88) is the magazine's television critic.

David Denby (The Current Cinema, p. 92) has published three books, including "American Sucker" and "Snark."

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

A conversation with *Raffi Khatchadourian* about his story on Iraq, plus readers' questions and an audio slide show. / The Political Scene, a weekly podcast with *Hendrik Hertzberg*, *Ryan Lizza*, and *Dorothy Wickenden*. / More photographs of Michael Jackson by *Kate Simon*. / Audio slide show: *Peter Schjeldahl* on James Ensor. / Video: phone sketches by *Jorge Colombo*. / The Book Club discusses "The Left Hand of Darkness," by Ursula K. Le Guin. / Blogs: *Alex Ross's* multimedia diary of Make Music, the Book Bench's summer reads. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a complete archive of issues, back to 1925.

THE MAIL

MAKING A MEMORIAL

Jon Lee Anderson's article fails to explain why our family does not wish to open the mass grave where Federico García Lorca is buried ("Lorca's Bones," June 22nd). We fully respect the right of all the victims' relatives to decide what to do with their ancestors' remains. But our desire is for Federico García Lorca's remains to rest where they are forever. In my two-hour conversation with Anderson, I addressed some of the historical, political, moral, and emotional issues that such an exhumation would entail. In the hills of Víznar and Alfacar, between a thousand and three thousand people were assassinated by Franco's troops in 1936, at the start of the Spanish Civil War. Their bodies were thrown into many mass graves. The families of two of the three victims who were shot and buried together with Federico García Lorca have formally petitioned to claim the bodies of their relatives, and there has been a judicial effort to exhume Lorca's body and several others. If the bodies are disinterred and their DNA does not match the families' DNA, what will be done with those remains? Will they be returned to the grave? We would choose to leave Lorca where he is, in the company of all victims, whether named or unnamed, whether remembered silently by their relatives or forgotten because they have none. We feel that the best way to remember all victims of the terrible crimes committed by Franco's troops is to preserve and protect this burial ground, where Lorca is one victim among many.

Laura García-Lorca
President
Fundación Federico García Lorca
Madrid, Spain

THE SUPREME COURT

Jeffrey Toobin's discussion of Chief Justice John Roberts's career makes it clear that partisanship is a driving force in the Chief Justice's decision-making process ("No More Mr. Nice Guy," May 25th). When a Justice makes such strong and repeated claims for legal neutrality while rendering decisions that consistently reflect a political agenda, one wonders whether he is unconsciously misleading himself, or consciously trying to mislead us. How can a Justice "interpret" the Constitution without bringing values, assumptions, and biases to bear? If they are clearly described, a Justice can acknowledge and account for their influence on his decisions, which can lead to open discussion. If not, the false neutrality can lead to an unconsidered, or manipulative, defense of an extreme position. The political values behind Roberts's interpretations lead to an affirmation of those who are powerful, and a disregard of those who are not.

Michael Durphy
Fairfax, Calif.

Toobin quotes the Yale law professor Akhil Reed Amar as saying, "An originalist on abortion would say that at the time of the Constitution, or of the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment, abortion was prohibited and that's it." To the contrary, abortions were legal and practiced, if viewed unfavorably, during that era. As Justice Harry Blackmun stated in the opinion of the Court in Roe v. Wade, in 1973, "It perhaps is not generally appreciated that the restrictive criminal abortion laws in effect in a majority of States today are of relatively recent vintage. . . . It is thus apparent that at common law, at the time of the adoption of our Constitution, and throughout the major portion of the 19th century, abortion was viewed with less disfavor than under most American statutes currently in effect. Phrasing it another way, a woman enjoyed a substantially broader right to terminate a pregnancy than she does in most States today." In this sense, the opinion in Roe is even more "originalist" than any that Justice Scalia could concoct.

Lloyd Targer
New York City

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Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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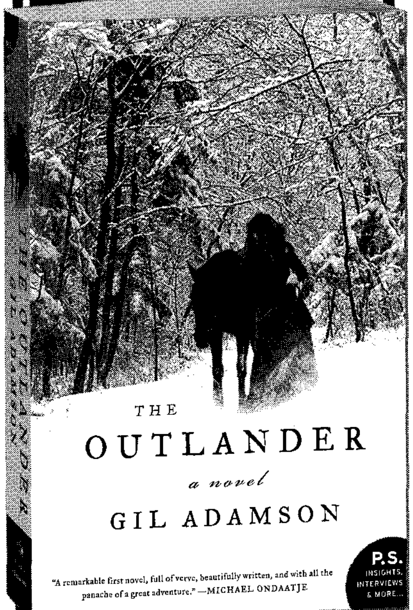
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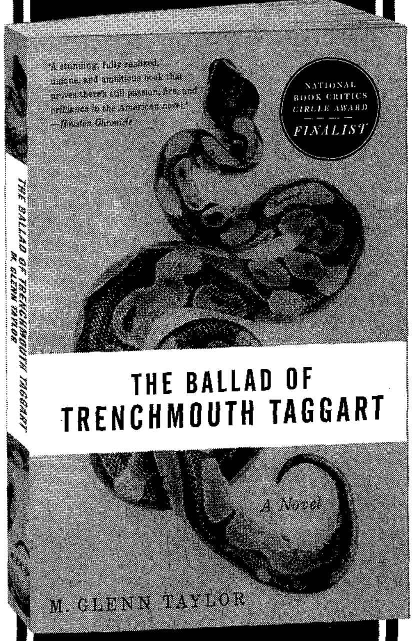
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The Brooklyn Philharmonic at the South Street Seaport. Photograph by Landon Nordeman.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14				

THIS WEEK

NIGHT LIFE
HOT TOWN

The dancing starts early at P.S. 1's "Warm Up" series, which for ten consecutive Saturday afternoons, beginning July 4, fills the courtyard of the Long Island City institution with exotic beats, experimental music, and crowds of eager young music and art lovers. (See page 11.)

ART
HEIGHT ANGLE

Good news: visitors to MOMA can walk tall. The museum has installed "Measuring the Universe," a performance-based work by the Slovakian artist Roman Ondák, in which the heights of visitors who consent to be measured are marked, by an attendant, on a wall in the second-floor galleries. (See page 11.)

DANCE
SUMMER SILENCE

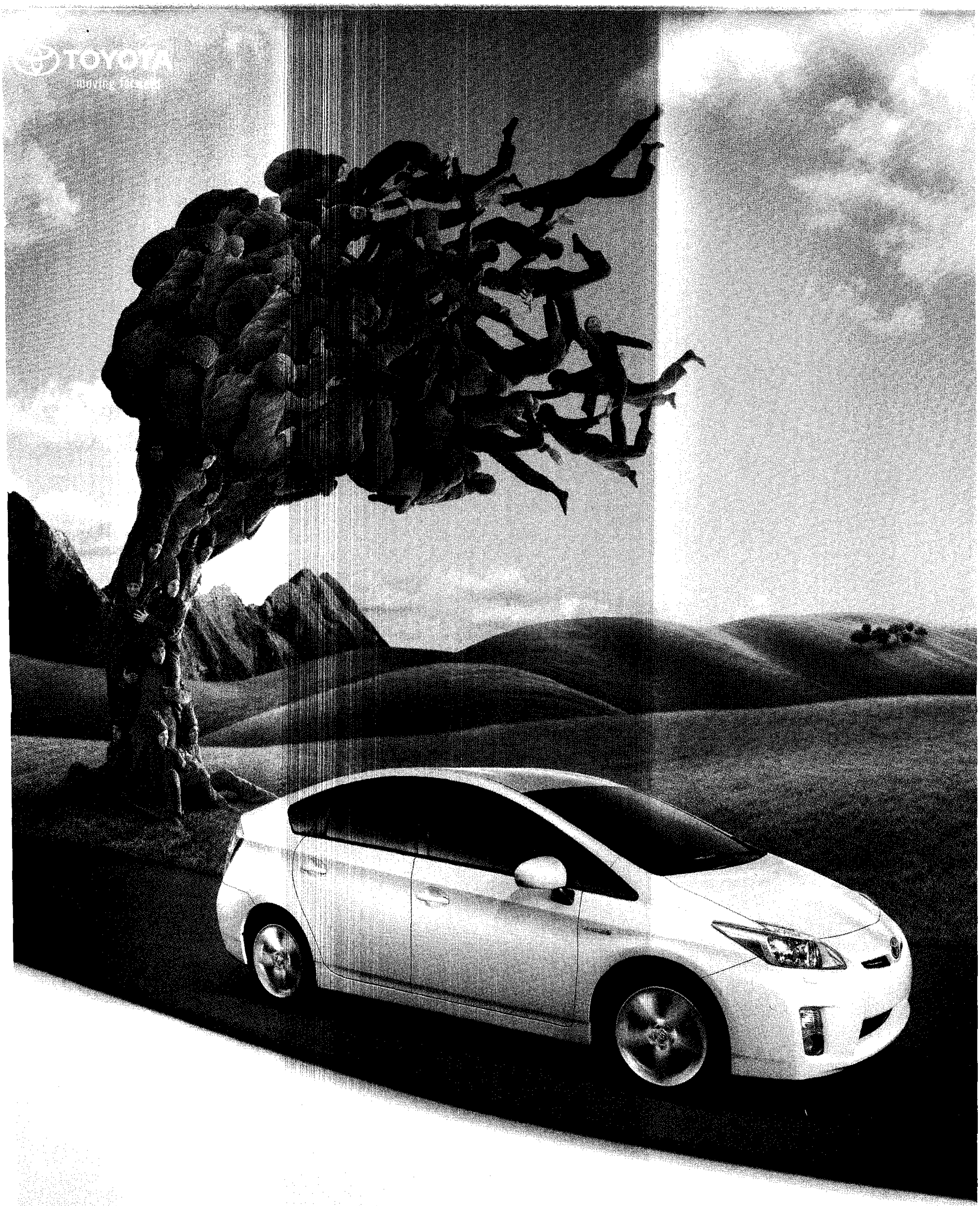
In 2006, when the Israeli choreographer Emanuel Gat débuted at the Lincoln Center Festival, he attracted attention with "Winter Voyage," a striking duet that approached Schubert lieder at odd angles. He returns to Lincoln Center with a sequel to that earlier work, "Winter Variations," as well as a scoreless ensemble piece, "Silent Ballet." (See page 14.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
HIGH PERFORMANCE

Tanglewood, the supreme music festival of the summer, roars into life in the Massachusetts countryside over the next two weeks, with a slate of concerts offered by such musicians as Emanuel Ax, Joshua Bell, Christian Tetzlaff, and James Levine (who conducts the Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra in Act III of "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg"). (See page 16.)

MOVIES
SINGING FOURTH

The only thing missing from the Film Society of Lincoln Center's Independence Day weekend musicals marathon is the flag-waving "Yankee Doodle Dandy." The fare includes such classics as "An American in Paris," "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," "Swing Time," and "The Gang's All Here," as well as newer films like "Hair" and "Tommy." (See page 20.)



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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
GRATE EXPECTATIONS

The Grates are an Australian trio who specialize in exuberance. Their sound is bouncy, unadorned rock that has family ties to the riot-grrrl tradition but has passed through several generations of pop-friendly breeding. (It is not unfair to say that they sound like a sunnier version of the Yeah Yeah Yeahs.) When they sing about sex, it sounds similar to younger, more innocent behavior: "Use your bed like a trampoline, I said, higher! Higher!" When they perform live, the singer Patience Hodgson takes all of her own advice. When I saw the band play at Pianos this spring, they stole the night away from several other bands. Hodgson has the easy, slim beauty of a movie star but wins the audience with strategies anyone could use: jumping up and down impatiently, twirling a gymnastic ribbon, and talking like a close friend to anyone in the audience who will listen. There is something ancient about Hodgson's approach to vote-getting, which is as unprecious as it gets. The Grates repeat the feat at Pianos on July 15.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

EAST TO EDINBURGH FESTIVAL
Shows heading to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe play here first. Opens July 14. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

LES ÉPHÉMÈRES
As part of the Lincoln Center Festival, Le Théâtre du Soleil performs a drama (created by the company) that explores the transience of human existence. Ariane Mnouchkine directs. In French with English supertitles. Opens July 7. (Park Avenue Armory, Park Ave. at 67th St. 212-721-6500.)

ICE FACTORY FESTIVAL
SoHo Think Tank's annual procession of new works begins with a play by Anonymous Ensemble, "A Wonderland," written and directed by Eamonn Farrell, with music by William Antoniou. Opens July 8. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-868-4444.)

IVANOV
At the Lincoln Center Festival, Budapest's Katona József Theatre presents the Chekhov play, directed by Tamás Ascher, transposed to Hungary in the nineteen-sixties and seventies. In Hungarian with English supertitles. July 7-11. (Gerald W. Lynch Theatre, John Jay College, Tenth Ave. at 58th St. 212-721-6500.)

KALKWERK
Narodowy Stary Teatr, from Kraków, presents an adaptation of Thomas Bernhard's 1970 novel, about an obsessive scientist who holds his disabled wife captive. Krystian Lupa directs, at the Lincoln Center Festival. In Polish with English supertitles. Opens July 14. (Gerald W. Lynch Theatre, John Jay College, Tenth Ave. at 58th St. 212-721-6500.)

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM
The Drilling Company opens its sixteenth Shakespeare in the Parking Lot season with this romantic comedy, free of charge, on the Lower East Side. Opens July 9. (Parking lot on the corner of Ludlow and Broome Sts. 212-877-0099.)

MIDTOWN INTERNATIONAL THEATRE FESTIVAL
This year's annual festival of new comedies, dramas, and musicals includes works such as "Whiskey, Beer and Apple Pie," "The Sword Politik," "Pound: The Poet on Trial," "Love, Humiliation and Karaoke," "Seal Songs," and "I Hate Love." Opens July 13. (Various locations. 866-811-4111.)

MOTHER
Buck Henry and Holland Taylor star in the première of Lisa Ebersole's drama, in which an eccentric family gathers for New Year's Eve at a resort in West Virginia. Previews begin July 8. (The Wild Project, 195 E. 3rd St. 212-352-3101.)

PTP/NYC
The politically minded company presents "Thérèse Raquin," adapted by Neal Bell from the Zola novel, directed by Jim Petosa, in previews and opening July 6. It plays in repertory with "The Europeans," by Howard Barker, directed by Richard Romagnoli, in previews and opening July 7. (Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 212-279-4200.)

SUMMER PLAY FESTIVAL
At the Public, the annual short-play festival includes works by Ken Urban, Zayd Dohrn, Rick Viede, and Nicki Bloom. Opens July 7. (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

THE TIN PAN ALLEY RAG
Roundabout Theatre Company presents a new musical, written by Mark Saltzman, about a fictitious meeting between Irving Berlin and Scott Joplin, featuring the music of both. Stafford Arima directs. In previews. Opens July 14. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

UNDERGROUNDZERO FESTIVAL
At P.S. 122, the third annual festival of experimental theatre includes works by TerraNOVA Collective, Kyle Jarrow, and Blessed Unrest, among many others. Opens July 7. (First Ave. at 9th St. 212-352-3101.)

VANITIES
Judith Ivey directs a musical based on the 1976 comedy by Jack Heifner, with music and lyrics by David Kirshenbaum, about three Texas cheerleaders who come of age during the dawn of women's lib. Previews begin July 2. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

WILDFLOWER
The second work of Second Stage's Uptown Series is a première by Lila Rose Kaplan, about a woman and her son, who attempt to break out of their small-town life. Giovanna Sardelli directs. Previews begin July 13. (McGinn/Cazale, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 212-246-4422.)

NOW PLAYING

ARCHBISHOP SUPREME TARTUFFE
Does any New York actor work as hard for his audiences as André De Shields? In the Classical Theatre of Harlem's modern spin on Molière by Alfred Preisser and Randy Weiner, De Shields is the hedonistic mega-preacher Tartuffe—a smooth talker in red velour, with a penchant for Cadillacs and women. Tartuffe has his fingers in the wallet of the fat cat Orgon (Gerron Atkinson), whose family is determined to expose the evangelist as a swindler. The story, told with maximum song and skin, is a celebration of vice—and of De Shields's ability to electrify a stage. It's to his credit that the play, structured as an ironic revival meeting, has something of the vitality of the real thing. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

DANCE OF THE SEVEN HEADED MOUSE
When her youngest daughter is killed in a drug-related car accident, Elly, a high-functioning socialite, shuts herself into her Fifth Avenue apartment in her bathrobe, mixing pills and white wine and hallucinating her dead daughter as a perfect little girl. Frightened that her mother is going to kill herself, Elly's unappreciated sixteen-year-old daughter, Avril, drops out of boarding school to care for her. The dysfunctionality of this situation is exposed when Juliana, a friend of Avril's from school, comes for the weekend. In a program note, the playwright, Carole Gaunt, expresses her wish that the play "give those suffering from . . . a parent's addiction a way to forgive themselves," so it's not surprising that the play, directed by Christopher McElroen, feels more like a made-for-television special. Though the author is well intentioned, the writing is melodramatic and shallow, and the story formulaic. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

STUNNING
David Adjmi's new play (under the direction of Anne Kauffman), set in the close-knit Syrian Jewish community in the Midwood section of Brooklyn, focusses on Lily Schwecky (Cristin Milioti), a sixteen-year-old Syrian Jewish girl who has been married off into a life of consumerist luxury with a brutish, sexed-up older husband, Ike (Danny Mastrogiorgio). It doesn't occur to the Schweckys that they might be anything other than white until Blanche Nesbitt (Charlayne Woodard) appears, responding to an ad for a maid. A black gay feminist intellectual trying to escape her past, Blanche is the least convincing of Adjmi's characters, which is surprising, given that she is Adjmi's de-facto self-portrait. It's entertaining to watch Adjmi equate intellectualism with sexiness, but occasionally he slips too far into the dry groves of academe, substituting theory for character. (Reviewed in our issue of 6/29/09.) (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. Through July 11.)

TWELFTH NIGHT
The one thing that audiences devoted to the Public Theatre's Shakespeare in the Park series share, whether they know it or not, is a love for the not so gentle art of upstaging. In the current production of Shakespeare's alternately lovely and confusing comedy, Jay O. Sanders (as Sir Toby Belch), Hamish Linklater (as Sir Andrew Aguecheek), and David Pittu (as Feste) chew and claw at the scenery with a gusto that does not connote relish so much as self-interest. The play is wildly, unevenly cast. Making her Public début, Anne Hathaway can emote, but can she make us feel anything about Viola's plight? There is some-

DANIELA SCHÜTT POZZO

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thing frozen and frightened at the core of her work. Viola's admirer, Olivia, as played by the great Audra McDonald—the star of the evening—displays a degree of self-knowledge (and experience) that is not fitting for an ingénue. Similarly, Julie White lends her gentlewoman, Maria, the look of a woman who's been around the block; White plays Maria as though she's the unsinkable Molly Brown. All of this becomes glaringly obvious when Stark Sands takes the stage. He's a lovely, modest young actor, with a soulful beauty that makes his Sebastian the least self-heralding of the performers seen here, and all the more refreshing because of it. Daniel Sullivan directs. (Delacorte, Central Park, enter at 81st St. and Central Park W. For information, call 212-539-8750. Through July 12.)

OUT OF TOWN

BAY STREET THEATRE
Moira Buffini's dinner-party satire "Dinner," directed by David Esbjornson, opens July 7. The cast includes Reed Birney, J. Smith Cameron, and Mercedes Ruehl. For more information, visit www.baystreet.org. (Sag Harbor, N.Y. 631-725-9500.)

HUDSON VALLEY SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
On the grounds of Boscobel, Terrence O'Brien directs Shakespeare's "Pericles, Prince of Tyre," in repertory with "Much Ado About Nothing" and "The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)." For more information, visit www.hvshakespeare.org. (Garrison, N.Y. 845-265-9575.)

SHAKESPEARE ON THE SOUND
Joanna Settle directs "A Midsummer Night's Dream," with original music composed by Stew ("Passing Strange"), in Greenwich, Conn., July 4-12. For more information, visit www.shakespeareonthesound.org. (Roger Sherman Baldwin Park, Greenwich, Conn. 203-299-1300.)

WILLIAMSTOWN THEATRE FESTIVAL
The season opens with A. R. Gurney's "Children," directed by John Tillinger and starring Mary Bacon, Katie Finneran, Judith Light, and James Waterston, on the Main Stage through July 12. On the Nikos Stage, opening July 8, Nicholas Martin directs the première of Jonathan Marc Sherman's "Knickerbocker," with a cast that includes Peter Dinklage and Reg Rogers. For more information, visit www.wtfestival.org. (Williamstown, Mass. 413-597-3400.)

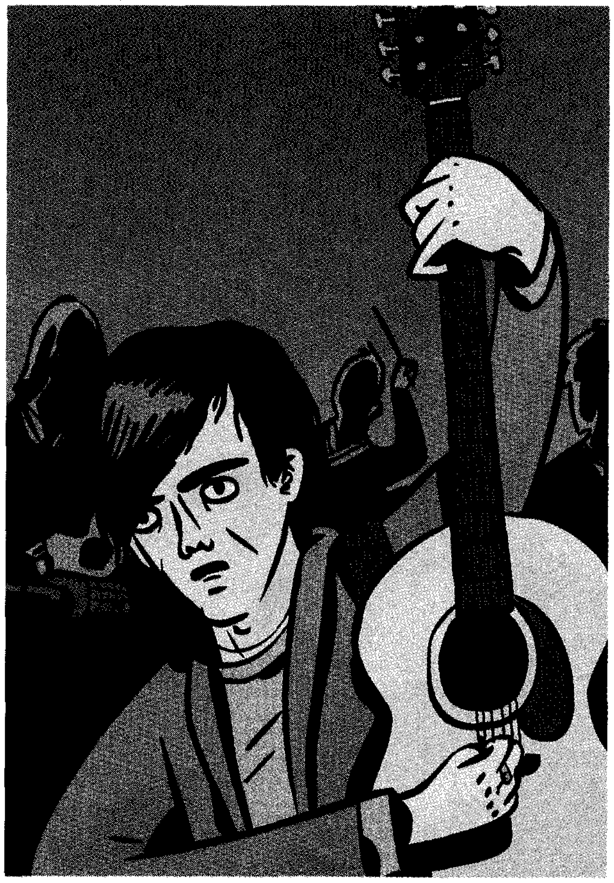
Also Playing

AVENUE Q: Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BLITHE SPIRIT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **CORALINE:** Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200. Through July 5. **GOD OF CARNAGE:** Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE-ROCK MUSICAL:** Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **MARY STUART:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **NEXT TO NORMAL:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **9 TO 5: THE MUSICAL:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE NORMAN CONQUESTS:** Circle in the Square, 235 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **OUR TOWN:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444. **ROCK OF AGES:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. **RUINED:** City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **UMBILICAL BROTHERS: SPEED MOUSE:** Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Through July 11. **WAITING FOR GODOT:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300. Through July 12. **WEST SIDE STORY:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-239-6200. **THE WIZ:** City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Through July 5.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—July 8: The **Rebirth Brass Band** brings in its New Orleans funk. July 14: The Jamaican dancehall kingpin **Barrington Levy.**



Conor Oberst and the Mystic Valley Band, at "River to River."

PUNY

THE BELL HOUSE
149 7th St., between Second and Third Aves., Brooklyn (718-643-6510)—July 11: Billowing dresses and skinny ties will be on display (along with, presumably, some gray hair and more than a few bald spots) at the John Hughes-inspired **"Pretty in Pink 80's Prom."** An eighties cover band will be on hand, and a king and queen will be chosen. The "chaperones" are the comedians Sara Schaefer and Dave Hill.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—July 1: The **Harlem Shakes'** new record, "Technicolor Health," stands as an impressive declaration of faith in the curative potential of hook-laden pop.

CELEBRATE BROOKLYN!
Prospect Park W. at 9th St. (718-855-7882, ext. 45)—July 1: A benefit show with **MGMT.** ♦ July 10: A night of rock *en español* with **Los Amigos Invisibles** and **Aterciopelados.** ♦ July 11: An afternoon show celebrating the work of the children's-book author Ezra Jack Keats features a performance by **They Might Be Giants.**

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. (212-360-2777)—July 5: The Malian singer **Oumou Sangare** has an otherworldly, serpentine voice. With **Les Nubians.** ♦ July 8: **Juana Molina,** an Argentinean singer who lays a whispery voice over softly strummed acoustic guitars and tender electronic effects.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—July 6-7: **Peter Murphy,** the inimitable voice and gaunt visage of the preëminent goth band Bauhaus. That storied British group abruptly disintegrated last year following a turbulent and unlikely reunion, and Murphy returned to his solo career. Now based in Turkey, he imbues his languid, melodramatic music with Middle Eastern elements, but still dusts off the odd Bauhaus classic for the black-clad faithful.

MIDSUMMER NIGHT SWING
Dancing under the stars at Lincoln Center gets under way on July 7 with the New Orleans brassman **Kermit Ruffins** and his smoking-hot band the **Barbecue Swingers.** July 8: **Chubby Checker** twists into town. July 9: The big-band sounds of the **Woody Herman Orchestra.** July 10: The **Occidental Brothers Dance Band International,** which comes from Chicago and plays smooth West African highlife, warms up the crowd for a Congolese extravaganza courtesy of **Samba Mapangala** and his orchestra **Virunga.** July 11: The **Big 3 Palladium Orchestra** plays the music of Machito, Tito Rodríguez, and Tito Puente. July 14: More swing music from the singer **Melba Joyce** and her big band. Through July 25. (For more information, visit www.lincolncenter.org.)

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG
66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-486-5400)—July 2: **Jay Reatard** evokes the frenetic energy of Ramones-era punk rock with his airtight power trio. The band's high-impact show is filled with carefully crafted hooks and melodies that will stay with you long after your ears have stopped ringing, a rare feat for a snotty pop-punk act. July 11: Long Island's **Brand New** launched its career as a by-the-numbers emo-punk band, churning out earnest paeans to lost love with bug-eyed ferocity, but the band has grown into something far more interesting. Their 2006 album, "The Devil and God Are Raging Inside Me," found them playing dense songs with melodies that matched the emotional intricacies of their lyrics.

(LE) POISSON ROUGE
158 Bleecker St. (212-505-3474)—July 2: Expressing their leftist political agenda by means of a tongue-in-cheek update of the family-band format, the Bushwick residents the **Trachtenberg Family Slideshow Players** deftly confront issues as varied as public executions, Bloomberg's rezoning policies, and the fast-food industry. In their live performances, a stunning multimedia act utilizing their trademark vintage slide shows augments their eccentric, lighthearted tunes.

RIVER TO RIVER FESTIVAL
July 1: The alt-country charmer **Tift Merritt.** (Rockefeller Park, Battery Park City.) ♦ July 3: Luke Temple has recently expanded his ethereal solo work into a five-piece outfit under the name of **Here We Go Magic.** The songwriting sounds referential without falling into the locutions of any individual pop dialect, and it has attracted praise from artists as diverse as Death Cab for Cutie's front man, Ben Gibbard, and Sufjan Stevens. All are attracted to Temple's wistful falsetto vocal style, which complements the intricately layered loops and themes of his songs. (South Street Seaport.) ♦ July 4: **Conor Oberst and the Mystic Valley Band.** Once upon a time, Oberst was a young folksinger with a lot to say. Now he's matured, though he's still young, and he says it with a rollicking country band. Expect them to put on quite a show for this free Independence Day performance. With **Jenny Lewis.** (Battery Park.) ♦ July 9: Sxip Shirey, like the mad impresario of an international punk circus, leads the Brooklyn-based **Luminescent Orchestrii** on resophonic guitar, with frequent recourse to melodeon, bullhorn harmonica, and various windup toys, bells, and whistles. The band's two fiddlers, Rima Fand and Sarah Alden, are as adept at Gypsy violin as they are at Appalachian folk raunch. Benjy Fox-Rosen favors a pint-size double bass, and adds jazz and tango to the mix.

Their influences include Doc Watson, Igor Stravinsky, the Dead Kennedys, and the Bulgarian Women's Choir. (World Financial Center. For more information about all the shows, visit www.rivertorivernyc.org.)

UNITED PALACE
4140 Broadway, at 175th St. (800-745-3000)—July 3: New York's **Sonic Youth** return with a vengeance with their new album, "The Eternal." Boasting a harder edge, the collection finds the band firing on all cylinders.

"WARM UP"
P.S. 1's summer afternoons of dance and experimental music and architecture get under way for the season on July 4 with **Reagenz** featuring **Jonah Sharp** (Spacetime Continuum), **Move D**, and **Daniel Bell.** July 11: The band **Arthur's Landing** plays the music of Arthur Russell, *the composer and musician who* was a downtown fixture up until his death, in 1992. With **DJ Danny Wang** and **MV Carbon & Aki Onda.** (P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, 22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City. 718-784-2084.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—July 1-4: The pianist **Toshiko Akiyoshi** and the saxophonist **Lew Tabackin**, who are married and who used to helm a jazz orchestra, now display their prodigious skills as improvisers in a co-led quartet. July 7: **Steve Kuhn** never got a chance to record with John Coltrane when he played in his band back in 1960, but this inventive pianist still harbors a soft spot for the music of the legendary saxophonist. Joining Kuhn in support of his new album, "Mostly Coltrane," are the saxophonist **Joe Lovano,** the bassist **David Finck,** and the drummer **Billy Drummond.** July 8-11: Unfairly and too often regarded as a perennial sideman, the trumpeter **Tim Hagans** is a gifted soloist as well as an overlooked composer. A first-rate quintet that includes the guitarist **John Abercrombie** and the pianist **Marc Copland** is on hand to lend support. July 14: The intuitive communication that the pianist **Frank Kimbrough** established with **Paul Motian** on the 2006 album "Play" will be on display when the renowned drummer joins Kimbrough for this one-off performance. **Jay Anderson** holds down the bass chair.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—July 7-12: The bassist **Ron Carter** leads his cello-stocked nonet.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—July 14-19: **Joe Chambers,** a still-creative drummer and vibraphonist best known for his work on Blue Note Records in the sixties, leads a quintet that finds room for the pianist **George Cables** and the percussionist **Steve Berrios.**

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—July 3: The charismatic saxophonist and flutist **Charles Lloyd** is joined by the pianist **Jason Moran,** the bassist **Reuben Rogers,** and the drummer **Eric Harland,** the same band that enlivened Lloyd's 2008 album, "Rabo de Nube."

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—July 2-5: The adroit trio of the pianist **Cyrus Chestnut.** July 9-12: A celebration of the music of Chick Corea, featuring the pianist **George Colligan** and an occasional Corea associate, the bassist **Eddie Gomez.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—June 30-July 3: His longtime stint with Branford Marsalis now history, the powerhouse drummer **Jeff (Tain) Watts** takes charge of a quintet that here welcomes the guest trumpeter **Nicholas Payton.** July 9-12: **Generations.** A generation or two actually do separate the saxophonist and Count Basie band veteran **Frank Wess** from his compatriots in this band. Younger worthies include **Eric Alexander, Jim Rotondi,** and **David Hazeltine.**

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—July 12: The saxophonist **Billy Harper,** a sixties veteran who has emerged from the subsequent decades with his passion intact, fronts a quintet with the pianist **Francesca Tanksley.**

(LE) POISSON ROUGE
158 Bleecker St. (212-505-3474)—July 7-8: A two-night salute to the music of the guitarist John McLaughlin with the **VishnuVoices Choir** and the **Mahavishnu Project.**

RIVER TO RIVER FESTIVAL
July 8: "Stepping off the Corner." A conglomerate of veteran players (**Michael Henderson, Badal Roy**) and fresher faces (**Rudresh Mahanthappa, Ingrid Jensen**) employs Miles Davis's 1972 album "On the Corner" as a point of departure. (Rockefeller Park. For more information, visit www.rivertorivernyc.org.)

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—June 30-July 5: **Anat Cohen** tips her hat to her *fellow-clarinettist Benny Goodman in his centen*nial year. A fluent post-bop saxophonist as well, Cohen is joined by the pianist **Benny Green,** the bassist **Peter Washington,** and the drummer **Lewis Nash.**

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul."** Through Sept. 20. ♦ **"Francis Bacon: A Centenary Retrospective."** Through Aug. 16. ♦ **"The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984."** Through Aug. 2. ♦ **"Roxy Paine on the Roof: Maelstrom."** Through Oct. 25. ♦ **"The Model as Muse: Embodying Fashion."** Through Aug. 9. ♦ **"Pen and Parchment: Drawing in the Middle Ages."** Through Aug. 23. ♦ **"Napoleon III and Paris."** Through Sept. 7. ♦ **"Augustus Saint-Gaudens in the Metropolitan Museum of Art."** Through Oct. 12. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

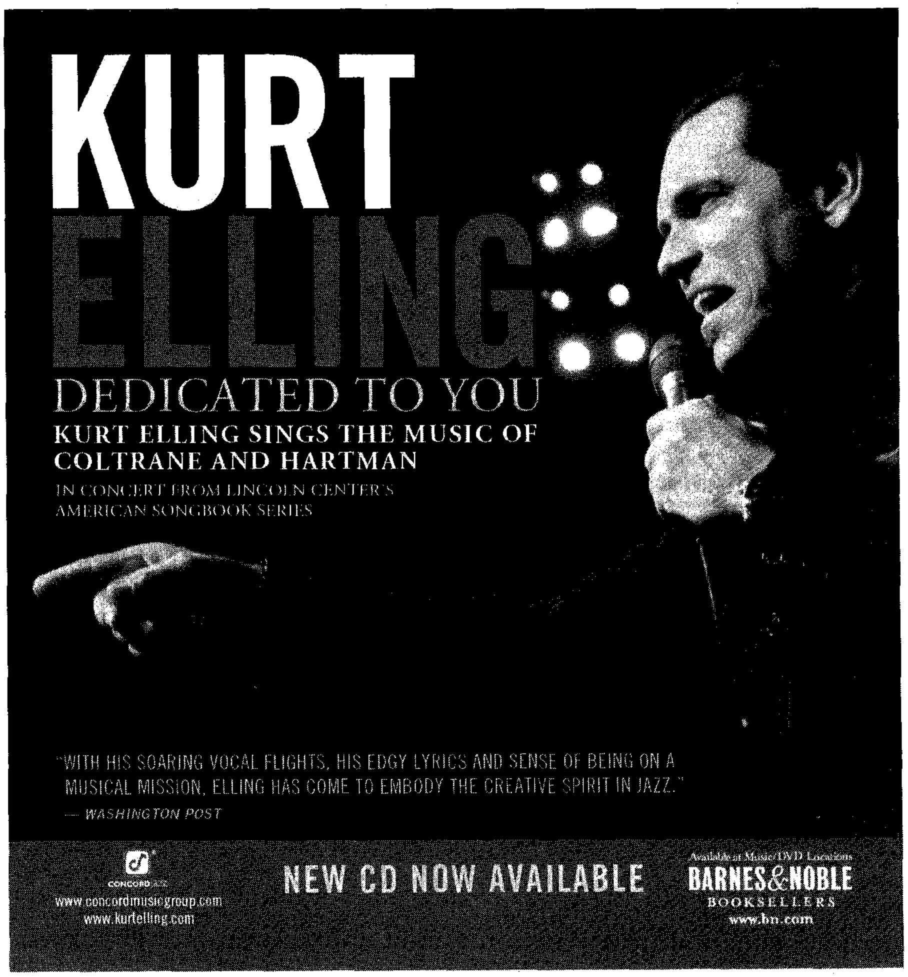
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"James Ensor."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Compass in Hand: Selections from the Judith Rothschild Foundation Contemporary Drawings Collection."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Projects 90: Song Dong."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Looking at Music: Side 2."** Through Nov. 30. ♦ **"Aernout Mik."** Through July 27. ♦ **"Performance 4: Roman Ondák."** Through Sept. 14. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Frank Lloyd Wright: From Within Outward."** Through Aug. 23. ♦ **"Intervals: Julieta Aranda."** Through July 19. (Open Fridays, and Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Saturdays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Dan Graham: Beyond."** Through Oct. 11. ♦ **"Claes Oldenburg: Early Sculpture, Drawings, and Happenings Films."** Through Sept. 6. ♦ **"Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen: The Music Room."** Through Sept. 6. ♦ **"Sadie Benning: Play Pause."** Through Sept. 20. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Yinka Shonibare MBE."** Through Sept. 20. ♦ **"Patricia Cronin: Harriet Hosmer, Lost and Found."** Through Jan. 24. ♦ **"Light of the Sufis: The Mystical Arts of Islam."** Through Sept. 6. ♦ **"Reflections in the Electric Mirror: New Feminist Video."** Through Jan. 10. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Extreme Mammals: The Biggest, Smallest, and Most Amazing Mammals of All Time."** Through Jan. 3. ♦ **"Climate Change: The Threat to Life and a New Energy Future."** Through Aug. 16. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)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AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM
45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)—**"Kaleidoscope Quilts: The Art of Paula Nadelstern."** Through Sept. 13. ♦ **"The Treasure of Ulysses Davis."** Through Sept. 6. (Tuesdays through Sundays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 7:30.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—**"Design for a Living World."** Through Jan. 4. (Open Mondays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
Seventh Ave. at 27th St. (212-217-5800)—**"Isabel Toledo: Fashion from the Inside Out."** Through Sept. 26. (Tuesdays through Fridays, noon to 8, and Saturdays, 10 to 5.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Portraits, Pastels, Prints: Whistler in the Frick Collection."** James Abbott McNeill Whistler's full-length portraits of three ladies and a gent have returned, after two decades in debilitating company nearby, to the Oval Room, where they hung when the museum opened, in 1935, and where they belong. In perfect scale and synergistic splendor, the paintings—"Harmony in Pink and Grey," "Symphony in Flesh Colour and Pink," "Arrangement in Brown and Black," and "Arrangement in Black and Gold"—solemnize the civil union of art and decoration that is a cynosure of the Frick. Like a visual tuning fork, Whistler's potent aestheticism resonates throughout the collection, with Velázquez, Rembrandt, and even Fragonard, another magus of sheer felicity. Through Aug. 23 (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Avedon Fashion 1944-2000."** Through Sept. 6. ♦ **"David Seidner: Paris Fashions, 1945."** Through Sept. 6. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

JAPAN SOCIETY
333 E. 47th St. (212-752-3015)—**"Buriki: Japanese Tin Toys from the Golden Age of the American Automobile."** Opens July 9. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 11 to 6, Fridays, 11 to 9, and weekends, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"They Called Me Mayer July: Painted Memories of a Jewish Childhood in Poland Before the Holocaust."** Through Oct. 1. ♦ **"Reclaimed: Paintings from the Collection of Jacques Goudstikker."** Through Aug. 2. (Open Thursdays to Tuesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Fridays, 11 to 4.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Creating the Modern Stage: Designs for Theatre and Opera."** Through Aug. 16. ♦ **"Pages of Gold: Medieval Illuminations from the Morgan."** Through Sept. 15. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEUM OF ARTS & DESIGN
2 Columbus Circle (212-299-7777)—**"Object Factory: The Art of Industrial Ceramics."** Through Sept. 13. ♦ **"Gord Peteran: Furniture Meets Its Maker."** Through July 26. (Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6; and Thursday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"Dutch Seen: New York Rediscovered."** Through Sept. 13. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"Reconfiguring the Body in American Art, 1820-2009."** Opens July 9. (Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NOGUCHI MUSEUM
9-01 33rd Rd., at Vernon Blvd., Long Island City (718-784-7088)—**"Noguchi Reinstalled."** Through Oct. 24. (Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Kenneth Anger."** Through Sept. 14. ♦ **"Lutz Bacher: My Secret Life."** Through Sept. 14. ♦ **"Jonathan Horowitz: And/Or."** Through Sept. 14. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

SCULPTURECENTER
44-19 Purves St., Long Island City (718-361-1750)—**"Rashid Johnson: Smoke and Mirrors."** Johnson is a "post-black" artist, meaning that he tackles issues of race from oblique angles instead of head-on. (The curator Thelma Golden has further defined the term as "post-Basquiat and post-Biggie.") In his spare installation at SculptureCenter, Johnson has placed potted plants in the center of the room and saves the visual interest (and the conceptual allure) for the margins. A wall-mounted, modular shelving unit houses books ranging from the 1968 classics "Black Rage," by William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, and "A Poet and His Camera," by Gordon Parks, to a monograph on Richard Serra—a hybrid of Carol Bove's bookshelves-as-sculpture and the enigmatic social critique of David Hammons. Through Aug. 3. (Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

SOCRATES SCULPTURE PARK
32-01 Vernon Blvd., at Broadway, Long Island City (718-956-1819)—**"State Fair."** Through Aug. 2. (Daily, 10 to sunset.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

DENNIS STOCK
If Stock's name rings a bell, it's probably because he took some of the most soulful photographs of James Dean in his Actors Studio days, a few of which are included in this career-spanning survey. Several other images here are similarly lodged in the universal image bank, two of them as counterculture icons: a woman dancing alone, high above the crowd at a rock festival, and a blissed-out hippie couple on horseback in the woods. Among the less familiar pictures, too many are funny but facile visual puns, in the style of Elliott Erwitt. But there are also some wonderfully atmospheric shots of jazz musicians, on stage and off, and movie stars and extras on Hollywood back lots. Through July 11. (Howard Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.)

STEPHEN SHORE
Best known as a pioneer of fine-art color photography in the seventies, Shore shows his black-and-white pictures from the sixties, when he was among the many young artists drawn into the scene of Andy Warhol's Factory. The photographs here are catnip for Warhol cultists and anyone in need of an Edie Sedgwick or Nico fix, but their appeal isn't just nostalgic. Shore is a good reporter, and the best of these pictures capture the Factory's fizzy surface buzz as well as its deeper, darker ennui. He does something similar in two huge recent New York streetscapes here, also in black-and-white, which

Short List

LARRY RIVERS: De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-262-5050. Through July 31. **MICHAEL SCOTT:** Gering + Lopez, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 646-336-7183. Through Aug. 21. **KATRÍN SIGURDARDÓTTIR:** Greenberg Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-445-0444. Through Aug. 21. **"BLUE":** Graham, 32 E. 67th St. 212-535-5767. Through Aug. 28.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

SID KAPLAN
The twenty-two photographs in a series Kaplan calls "Urban Stonehenge" look, at first glance, almost identical. All are views of Manhattan looking west, down a corridor of towering buildings toward a jagged patch of sky and the setting sun. The theme is all the more engrossing for its rich and subtle variations. Emphasizing the buildings' bulk, Kaplan allows them to recede into a featureless darkness. They form a strikingly graphic, funnel-like frame for the sun, which sits just above the horizon, sometimes as a brilliant blaze of light, sometimes as a pale wafer in the sky. As the city fades to black, the skyscrapers part like velvet curtains, bowing to the sun, at center stage. Through July 11. (Bell, 511 W. 25th St. 212-691-3883.)

TABLES FOR TWO
MINETTA TAVERN

MINETTA
TAVERN
RESTAURANT

ELIZA HONEY

113 MacDougal St. (212-475-3850)—Since 1937, this Village red-sauce relic had sat quietly at the end of Minetta Lane—that is, until recently, when the restaurateur Keith McNally (Odeon, Balthazar, Pastis) revamped the place, with the help of Balthazar chefs Lee Hanson and Riad Nasr. The vibe now is less seedy watering hole, more claustrophobe-celeb. The clipboard-clutching assistant on the sidewalk serves as an ominous reminder that reservations are nearly impossible to obtain; the fortunate few might be granted admittance to drink at the bar and hope a table opens up.

The wait isn't much mitigated by the cacophonous crush at the bar, where courtly gentlemen serve complicated drinks that convey the modern-nostalgic speakeasy ethos: the Dodd Cocktail, a froth of Basil Hayden's bourbon, La Fée absinthe, peach bitters, lemon, and egg white, is more fun to read about than to drink. But once you land a table, good things start to happen. On the bistro-style menu, the rightful star is the much talked about $26 Black Label burger, a custom blend of dry-aged rib eye, skirt steak, and brisket from the Pat La Frieda meat company, which is seared, bathed in clarified butter, and topped with caramelized onions—cheese is not recommended—on a Balthazar Bakery bun. (There is also a "regular" burger, for $16, made of what used to be La Frieda's "premium" blend.) The burger is a deal compared to the decent, if not transporting, dry-aged *côte de boeuf* for two (the same rib eye used in the Black Label burger, for $90), which comes with heavenly roasted bone marrow and a meagre sucrine-lettuce salad.

Other dishes are, for the most part, exquisitely executed, including a bracing *salade de pissenlit*, dandelion greens, egg, and anchovy dressing; *crème billi bi*, a subtle mussel soup (the recipe is adapted from Maxim's, in Paris); and, for an entrée, delicate trout meunière or a robust guinea-hen special, stuffed with foie gras, sweetbreads, and chanterelles. Although the room starts to feel like a pressure cooker at times, and the staff occasionally betrays a note of mild desperation (there's barely anywhere for them to stand), for the most part, they keep it together, because, as one lovely waitress said, "There's no crying in baseball." (Open daily for dinner. Entrées $16-$90.)

—Shauna Lyon

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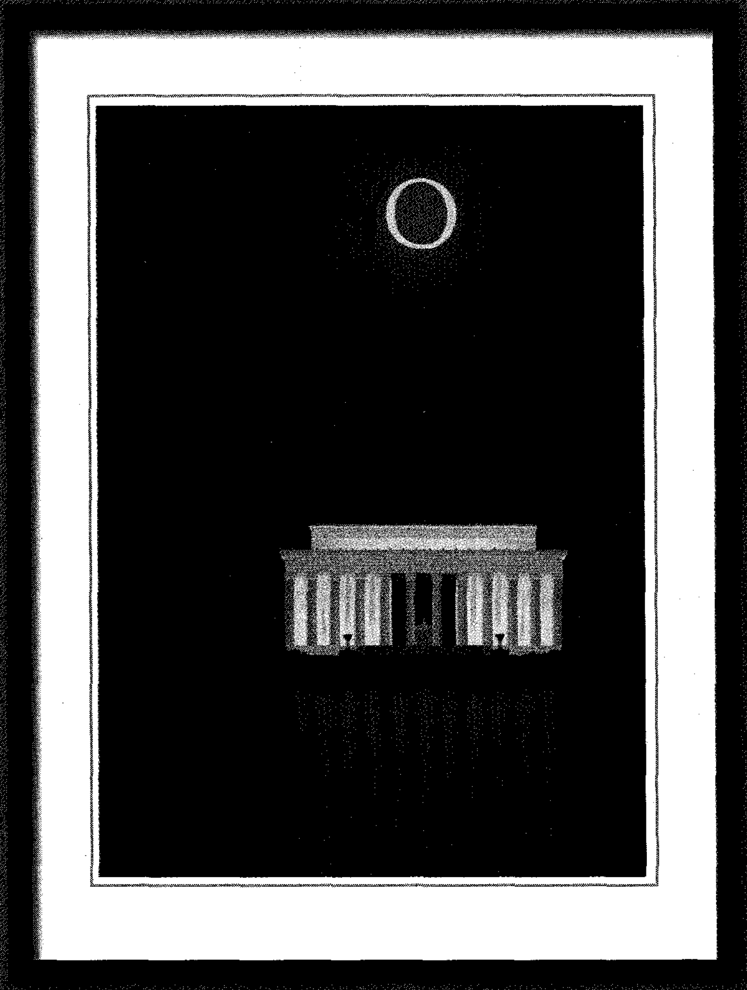
REFLECTION

by Bob Staake

Issue date: November 17, 2008



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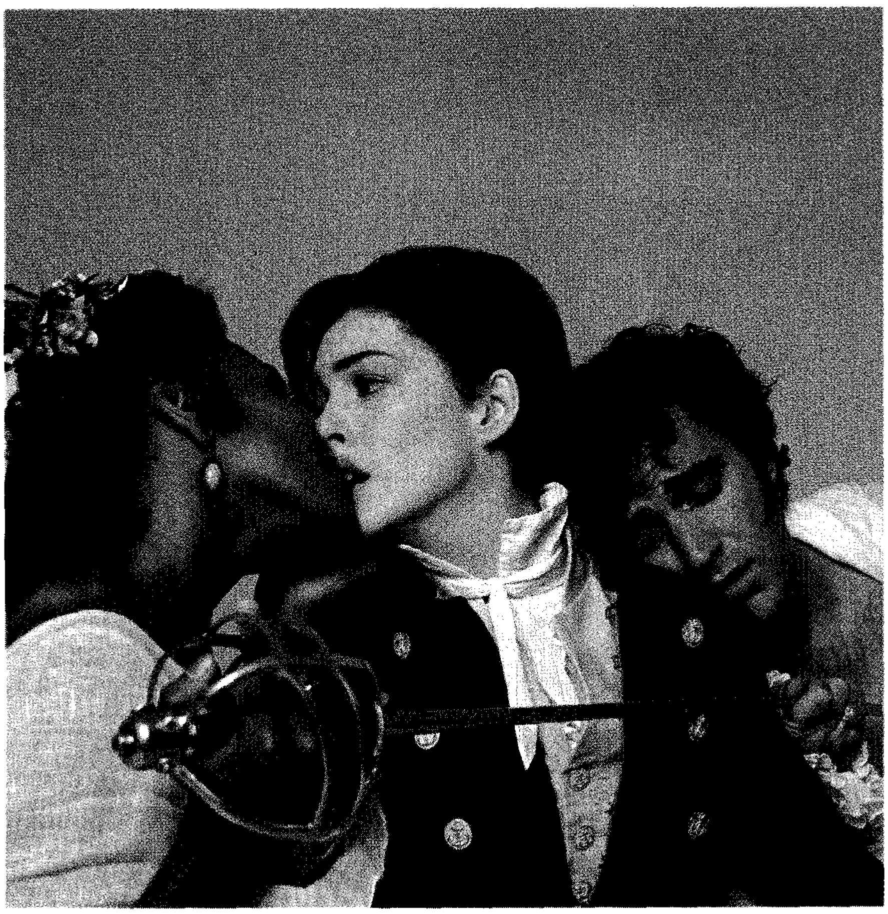
freeze a panoramic slice of a city oblivious of its own contradictions. Through July 18. (303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121.)

Short List

GUYTON\WALKER: Greene Naftali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770. Through Aug. 8. **ZARINA HASHMI:** Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100. Through July 31. **DOROTHY IANNONE:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through Aug. 21. **HENDRIK KERSTENS:** Witzenhausen, 547 W. 27th St. 212-239-1124. Through July 11. **SHINIQUE SMITH:** Lambert, 550 W. 21st St. 212-242-3611. Through July 31. **BASIL WOLVERTON:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Aug. 14. **"THE FEMALE GAZE":** Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727. Through Sept. 19. **"A SENSED PERTURBATION":** Murray Guy, 453 W. 17th St. 212-463-7372. Through July 31. **"SLOUGH":** Nolan, 527 W. 29th St. 212-925-6190. Through July 24. **"WE GAVE A PARTY FOR THE GODS AND THE GODS ALL CAME":** Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335. Through July 31.



Audra McDonald, Anne Hathaway, and Raúl Esparza in "Twelfth Night," opens the Public's Shakespeare in the Park season. Photograph by Brigitte Lacombe.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

FRANK HAINES

Haines ranges across mediums—and levels of consciousness—in his first solo show in New York. The gallery's three walls have been painted black, white, and gray in what may be a nod to the early-twentieth-century exhibition designs of Hilla Rebay, a co-founder of the Guggenheim Museum, or, perhaps, to the era's fascination with Freud's theory of the conscious, subconscious, and unconscious mind. A pair of pyramids, one black and one white, mirror each another; crepuscular paintings of esoteric symbols vacillate between the surrealist and the vaguely spiritualist (early Miro, the vibrational drawings of Emma Kunz, and Lee Mullican's countercultural abstractions all come to mind). A soundtrack recorded by Haines on a Prophet 600, the synthesizer favored by slasher-film composers, heightens the sepulchral air. Through July 3. (Cooley, 34 Orchard St. 212-680-0564.)

"A DESPOT IN FLORA'S GARDEN"

The indexical impulse takes a poetic turn in this show curated by Jasper Sharp. An installation by Hans Schabus relays an unorthodox slave narrative, tracing the journey of stones used as ballast in British slave ships that sailed to Savannah, Georgia, where they were repurposed as cobblestones. Armando Andrade Tudela's slide show highlights affinities between the hand-painted murals on Peruvian trucks and modernist design. Rosa Barba has filmed an unsettling meditation on the desolate Mojave Desert landscape, used for military purposes in the Second World War. Current events lend special interest to Michael Stevenson's photographs of faded letters on a brick wall—they refer to a short-lived gallery in Tehran, which opened in 1978 and closed just days later as martial law was imposed. Through July 26. (Preston, 301 Broome St. 212-431-1105.)

Short List

PEARL BLAUVELT / ELE D'ARTAGNAN: K.S. Art, 73 Leonard St. 212-219-9918. Through July 5. **ROCHELLE FEINSTEIN:** APF Lab, 15 Wooster St. 212-966-0193. Through July 23. **THOMAS LAWSON:** Participant, Inc., 253 E. Houston St. 212-254-4334. Through July 26. **ZIN TAYLOR:** Abreu, 36 Orchard St. 212-995-1774. Through Aug. 2. **"THE ANKLE BONE IS HIGHER ON THE INSIDE":** Museum 52, 4 E. 2nd St. 347-789-7072. Opens July 2. **"AS SMALL AS IT GETS":** Art Since the Summer of '69, 195 Chrystie St. 347-208-5437. Through July 15. **"THE LIVING AND THE DEAD":** Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258. Opens July 1. **"LOVER":** On Stellar Rays, 133 Orchard St. 212-598-3012. Through July 26. **"NO BEES, NO BLUEBERRIES":** Harris Lieberman, 89 Vandam St. 212-206-1290. Through July 30.

DANCE

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE

Frederick Ashton's "Sylvia" (1952) gives the heroine every opportunity to shine—as heroic huntress, clever seductress, woman in love. Michele Wiles, who has proven especially suited to the role, will dance alongside the Italian heartthrob Roberto Bolle on July 1 (in the evening), with the ardent young Cory Stearns in the role of the thwarted lover. The final week of the company's spring season is devoted to Kenneth MacMillan's "Romeo and Juliet," a lush, theatrical affair befitting Prokofiev's dark score. Here, Diana Vishneva and Marcelo Gomes (July 6) are sure to set hearts aflutter, though David Hallberg as Romeo, with Gillian Murphy as his Juliet (July 8 and July 11 at 2), should also make quite an impact. ♦ June 29-30 and July 2 at 7:30, July 1 at 2 and 7:30, July 3 at 8, and July 4 at 2: "Sylvia." ♦ July 6-7 and July 9 at 7:30, July 8 at 2 and 7:30, July 10 at 8, and July 11 at 2 and 8: "Romeo and Juliet." (Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center. 212-362-6000.)

"UNTITLED CORNER"

As part of L.M.C.C.'s "Sitelines," the choreographer-dancers Jonah Bokaer and Judith Sanchez Ruiz perform a coldly intimate duet in a corner built into Chase Manhattan Plaza by the visual artist Daniel Arsham. Surrounded by neighboring skyscrapers, Arsham's walls melt, opening up apertures for light and entrances and exits for the dancers and making tacit allusions to melting architecture in Lower Manhattan. (1 Chase Manhattan Plaza, at Nassau St. 212-219-9401. July 6, July 10, and July 13 at 12:30 and July 8 at 7. Through July 17.)

STREB

The action heroes of Williamsburg bring some of their newest science-experiment equipment to Celebrate Brooklyn! On a turntable floor or a huge hamster wheel called the Whizzing Gizmo, the acrobat-athletes toy with invisible forces matter-of-factly, relying on teamwork and crackerjack timing. (Prospect Park Band Shell. 718-855-7882. July 9 at 8.)

SHEN WEI DANCE ARTS

Shen Wei's extraordinary pictorial sense—seen the world over at last year's Beijing Olympics—is a profound synthesis of aestheticized movement, painting, film, and design. "Re—(I, II, III)," a compendium of impressions of Tibet, Cambodia, and China, will be performed for the first time in New York at the Lincoln Center Festival. (Alice Tully Hall, Broadway at 65th St. 212-721-6500. July 9-11 at 8.)

ISADORANOW

At Joyce SoHo, this small troupe reconstructs two politically charged Isadora Duncan works, "Polonaise" and "Varshavianka," and performs three new dances inspired by Duncan's revolutionary spirit. (155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. July 9-11 at 8.)

"TAP CITY 2009"

The recession-year retrenchment of the New York City Tap Festival has an upside: all the talent gets concentrated into a single evening. Jason Samuels Smith, Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards, Derick K. Grant, and Kazu Kumagai number among the greatest hoofers living, and Brenda Bufalino's gutsy "Haitian Fight Song," re-created for the occasion, is a landmark in tap choreography. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. July 10 at 8.)

EMANUEL GAT DANCE

The Israeli choreographer achieved quick fame by approaching hallowed scores irreverently—dancing salsa to "The Rite of Spring," fastening club moves onto the beat of Mozart's "Requiem." But his new "Silent Ballet," presented at the Lincoln Center Festival, proceeds, as the title indicates, without accompaniment. The stage is also bare, and across it the ensemble clumps and disperses in shifting groups and pairings, sometimes freezing in tense tableaux, sometimes playing a sombre game of tag. Gat's "Winter Variations" returns to the duet territory of his best work, "Winter Voyage," setting two large men in uneasy relation to each other and to music by

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
A MAN AND HIS DOG

André Bazin wrote that when Vittorio De Sica's "Umberto D." opened in Paris, in 1952, "a conspiracy of silence, a sullen and obstinate reticence" grew up around it (in contrast to the acclaim that greeted "The Bicycle Thief," which came out four years earlier).

VICTOR MARCHAND KERLOW

The resistance to this great neo-realist film (screening at MOMA July 11 and July 13) is not hard to understand. Umberto D. (Carlo Battisti) is a retired civil servant who lives with his little dog in a strange, erotically charged Roman boarding house on nothing but a small pension. He has the standards, the pride, and a few of the possessions of a middle-class man, but he's broke. Easily wounded, he's also ornery, and crafty; he irritates people by refusing to admit that he's licked. The story nearly fulfills the screenwriter Cesare Zavattini's prescription for neo-realism—a ninety-minute movie in which nothing happens. But, of course, an entire world of social indifference and need fills the screen. Despite its bleak outlook, the movie is charged with surprising touches of wit and humor, and the footage shot on the Roman streets is extraordinarily beautiful.

—David Denby

Richard Strauss and the Beatles. (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. July 14 at 8. Through July 17.)

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW
The Taiwanese dancer Fang-Yi Sheu (formerly of Martha Graham) introduces her new company, LAFA & Artists (at the Doris Duke July 1-5). The pieces, all choreographed by Bulareyaung Pagarlava, range from "Single Room," a languid solo for Sheu, to "37 Arts," which starts out with silent-movie comedy and circus acrobatics before turning dark. ♦ "Radio and Juliet" (July 1-5 at the Ted Shawn), by the Romanian choreographer Edward Clug, performed by members of the Slovenian troupe Ballet Maribor, is a stylish, sexy, but not very profound remix of the ever-popular Shakespeare tragedy, set to Radiohead. ♦ One of the festival's highlights is the world première of Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's "Orbo Novo," made for the excellent—and versatile—dancers of Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet (July 8-12 at the Ted Shawn). Cherkaoui's highly textured—and theatrically astute—compositions have made him enormously popular in Europe, and this new work should prove a powerful calling card. ♦ Andrea Miller's company Gallim Dance (at the Doris Duke July 8-12) indulges in Miller's compelling, decidedly unpretty brand of movement in "Blush," a jagged suite that lays bare the animal elements of our nature. (Ted Shawn, Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. Through Aug. 30.)

LUCINDA CHILDS
When the beautiful and austere minimalist choreographer Childs made "Dance" in 1979—an evening-length ensemble work for the BAM opera-house stage with a commissioned score by Philip Glass—it marked a turn in her career that was larger than her career alone. Downtown loft-dwelling dance-makers were returning to music and seeking larger audiences. That moment is preserved in the immaculate dance, revived for the opening of Bard SummerScape, and, more obviously, in Sol LeWitt's film of the original, projected onto a scrim in front of the current dancers. What was once a study in perception, in medium, is now more of a meditation on history and time. (Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900. July 9-11 at 8 and July 12 at 3.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
CONCERTS IN TOWN

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC: "SUMMERTIME CLASSICS"
Bramwell Tovey's annual series with the Phil concentrates on what used to be called the "light classics" repertoire, offered in a more relaxed setting and framed by the conductor's avuncular manner. "Born on the Fourth of July" features an exceptional piano soloist—the Canadian dazzler Marc-André Hamelin—in "Rhapsody in Blue," part of an all-American program that also includes two other Gershwin works as well as Copland's "Appalachian Spring" Suite and a clutch of Sousa marches. (July 3 at 8 and July 4 at 3.) ♦ Liszt's dreamy Piano Concerto No. 2 should be the perfect vehicle for the Philharmonic début of Simone Dinnerstein; the concerts, entitled "From the Danube to the Rhine," also feature music by Brahms, Strauss (the suite from "Der Rosenkavalier"), and Johann Strauss II. (July 7-8 at 7:30.) ♦ The mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves brings her dark-hued vocalism to the final program, a French affair that features excerpts from Bizet's "Carmen" and Saint-Saëns's "Samson and Delilah" along with Berlioz's "Le Corsaire" Overture and Ravel's "Boléro." (July 9 at 7:30 and July 10 at 8.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC: "CONCERTS IN THE PARKS"
Unlike Lorin Maazel, Alan Gilbert plans to be a very New York-centric music director of Gotham's great orchestra: as a case in point, he leads all the concerts in the Phil's annual free summer series (held outdoor and indoor, this year). The first takes place, naturally, on Central Park's Great Lawn, featuring Mozart's "Jupiter" Symphony and Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 in A Major. (July 14 at 8. No tickets required. www.nyphil.org/summer. Through July 20.)

BARGEMUSIC
July 4 at 7 and July 5 at 3: The Voxare Quartet (and its guardian angel, the violinist and Bargemusic director Mark Peskanov) gets into the patriotic spirit, mixing music by Dvořák (the "American" Quartet) and Duke Ellington with Mendelssohn's String Quintet No. 2 in B-Flat Major, a paragon of European elegance. ♦ July 8 and July 10 at 8: In "Bar la Barca," the adventurous vocal ensemble Western Wind comes to the barge to make a foray into waterborne music theatre, pairing "Barca di Venetia per Padova," Adriano Banchieri's early-Baroque "madrigal comedy," with "Jukebox in the Tavern of Love," a recent work by the avant-garde theatrical pioneer Eric Salzman; Valeria Vasilevski directs. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

SUMMERGARDEN
Concerts of new music and jazz have been a long-standing tradition at the Museum of Modern Art's Sculpture Garden. Members of the New Juilliard Ensemble offer the first program, an evening of premières by such noted composers as Andy Vores, Eric Tanguy, and Robert X. Rodríguez. (11 W. 53rd St. July 5 at 8. No tickets required; seats are first come, first served.)

METROPOLITAN OPERA SUMMER RECITAL SERIES
In late August, the Met will show H.D. films of past productions in Lincoln Center Plaza; until then, it presents a series of free voice-and-piano recitals in several city parks. The first (the only one for which free tickets must be reserved), given at Central Park Summerstage, is the most prominent, featuring such outstanding young singers as Paulo Szot (taking a night off from his duties in "South Pacific"), Lisette Oropesa, and Alek Shrader. (Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. July 13 at 8. For details, see www.metopera.org/parks.)

OUT OF TOWN

CARAMOOR
July 2 at 7:30: A spell of concerts at Westchester's smaller but more elegant equivalent to Tanglewood begins with an intimate recital in the estate's Sunken Garden by the guitarist David Leisner. ♦ July 4 at 8: Michael Barrett, the festival's general director, conducts an Independence Day concert of music by Sousa, Gershwin, and Ellington, featuring the vocalist Darius de Haas. ♦ July 5 at 4:30: The exuberant Pacifica Quartet joins the New York pianist Jeremy Denk for an afternoon of music by Mendelssohn, Ligeti (the String Quartet No. 1, "Métamorphoses Nocturnes"), and Dvořák (the Piano Quintet). ♦ July 10 at 8: The mezzo-soprano Susan Graham's services to French music have been so impressive that the French government has made her a member of the Légion d'Honneur. She joins Brian Zeger for a recital entitled "Un Frisson Français: A Century of French Song." ♦ July 11 at 8: The fervent young cellist Alisa Weilerstein, a favorite at Caramoor, is the guest of the Orchestra of St. Luke's in a concert of music (without conductor) by Haydn (the Symphony No. 6, "Morning," and the Cello Concerto in D Major) and Schubert. (Katonah, N.Y. 914-232-1252. For full schedule, see www.caramoor.org.)

TANGLEWOOD
Boston's musical duchy goes into high gear in the next two weeks; a selection of concerts follows. July 3 at 8:30: In the official opening-night gala, James Levine conducts the Boston Symphony Orchestra in an all-Tchaikovsky program—the Symphony No. 6, "Pathétique," and the First Piano Concerto (with the commanding Yefim Bronfman). ♦ July 5 at 8: In the first of three concerts, Christian Tetzlaff and Alexander Lonquich offer a survey of Beethoven's complete Sonatas for Violin and Piano. ♦ July 10 at 8:30: Herbert Blomstedt conducts the B.S.O. in Nielsen's "Helios" Overture, Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto (with Emanuel Ax), and Brahms's Symphony No. 4 in E Minor. ♦ July 11 at 8:30: In one of two oper-

atic ventures this season, James Levine conducts the instrumental and vocal fellows of the Tanglewood Music Center—along with such singers as James Morris, Johan Botha, and Hei-Kyung Hong—in Act III of Wagner's "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg." ♦ July 12 at 2:30: Blomstedt and the B.S.O., with Joshua Bell as their guest, return to offer music by Beethoven, Bruch (the Violin Concerto No. 1 in G Minor), and Dvořák (the Symphony No. 8). ♦ July 14 at 8: Jordi Savall's splendid Concert de Nations makes its Tanglewood début with two programs; the first features concertos by Biber, Corelli, Scarlatti, and Handel. (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200. For full schedule, see www.tanglewood.org.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS
July 4 at 6: Maverick, one of the oldest music festivals in the country, hosts distinguished ensembles in its "music chapel," nestled in the forest around Woodstock. The season begins with a concert by the venerable Tokyo String Quartet, which performs quartets by Beethoven (Op. 95, "Serioso"), Janáček (No. 2, "Intimate Pages"), and Mendelssohn. ♦ July 5 at 4: The series' celebration of the bicentennial of Mendelssohn's birth continues with the vibrant Shanghai Quartet, which offers the composer's String Quartet No. 2 in A Minor as well as works by Debussy and Penderecki (his new Quartet No. 3, "Leaves from an Unwritten Diary"). ♦ July 12 at 4: The Rossetti String Quartet, admired for its warm sound and fleet, Francophone style, returns to the Maverick for an afternoon of quartets by Mozart, Gounod (the rarely played Quartet No. 3), and Ravel. (Woodstock, N.Y. www.maverickconcerts.org.)

TANNERY POND
This intimate, almost private festival, a labor of love by the photographer Christian Steiner, presents several concerts per summer in a beautifully restored Shaker tannery barn. The smart and surpassingly elegant Brentano String Quartet offers the next concert, an evening of works by Haydn, Beethoven (the "Razumovsky" Quartet No. 3), and Monteverdi (four madrigals, arranged by Mark Steinberg). (New Lebanon, N.Y. 800-820-1696. July 4 at 8.)

ASTON MAGNA
In the longtime early-music festival's major offering of the summer, Nancy Armstrong, Frank Kelley, and other fine singers will perform John Gay's "Beggar's Opera," the bawdy Georgian entertainment that served as the basis for Kurt Weill's "Threepenny Opera"; Daniel Stepner leads the ensemble from his Baroque violin. (Olin Hall, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7425. July 3 at 8. For full schedule, see www.astonmagna.org.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN
The fine art of the string quartet is celebrated every weekend in the festival's whitewashed shoe-box hall. July 5 at 3: An afternoon with the Zimro Project—a klezmer-influenced ensemble headed by the acclaimed clarinettist Alexander Fiterstein—is a bit of a departure, offering works by Prokofiev (the "Overture on Hebrew Themes"), Mozart (the Clarinet Quintet), and Osvaldo Golijov. ♦ July 12 at 3: The Amernet Quartet, with the violinist Toby Appel, performs music by Loeffler, Haydn, and Mendelssohn (the String Quintet No. 2 in B-Flat Major). (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126.)

NORFOLK CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL
The season at the Yale School of Music's summer outpost begins festively with a program offered by both the Tokyo and Jasper String Quartets, performing works by Haydn, Beethoven, and Mendelssohn (the Octet for Strings). (Norfolk, Conn. 860-542-3000. July 10 at 8. For full schedule, see www.norfolkmusic.org.)

WINDHAM MUSIC FESTIVAL
A special guest—the distinguished violinist Elmar Oliveira—graces the chamber-music festival's annual orchestra concert, in which Robert Manno conducts Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante for Violin and Viola (with Sandra Robbins) and Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings. (Windham Performing Arts Center, Windham, N.Y. www.windhammusic.com. July 11 at 8.)

MOVIES OPENING

THE BEACHES OF AGNÈS
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening July 1. (Film Forum.)

BRÜNO
In this comedic faux documentary, directed by Larry Charles, Sacha Baron Cohen's gay Viennese fashionista comes to America. Opening July 10. (In wide release.)

THE GIRL FROM MONACO
A drama about a French lawyer (Fabrice Luchini) who travels to Monaco to defend a woman accused of murder. Directed by Anne Fontaine. In French. Opening July 3. (Angelika Film Center and Beekman.)

HUMPDAY
A comedy directed by Lynn Shelton, about two heterosexual men who make a gay-porn film together in the hope of winning a contest. Starring Mark Duplass and Joshua Leonard. Opening July 10. (In limited release.)

I LOVE YOU, BETH COOPER
A comedy, directed by Chris Columbus, about a high-school valedictorian (Samm Levine) who declares his love for a popular girl (Hayden Panettiere). Opening July 10. (In wide release.)

ICE AGE: DAWN OF THE DINOSAURS
The third installment of the animated series, directed by Carlos Saldanha and Michael Thurmeier. With the voices of John Leguizamo and Queen Latifah. Opening July 1. (In wide release.)

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LAKE TAHOE

Fernando Eimbcke directed this comic drama, about a young Mexican man whose life is changed by a minor car accident. In Spanish. Opening July 10. (Anthology Film Archives.)

LION'S DEN

In this drama, directed by Pablo Trapero, a pregnant woman who kills her lover is sent to a prison for expectant mothers. In Spanish. Opening July 3. (IFC Center.)

PUBLIC ENEMIES

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening July 1. (In wide release.)

SOUL POWER

A documentary about the 1974 music festival that accompanied Muhammad Ali and George Foreman's Rumble in the Jungle, in Zaire. Directed by Jeffrey Levy-Hinte. Opening July 10. (In wide release.)

THE VANISHED EMPIRE

A drama, directed by Karen Shakhnazarov, about a trio of teen-agers growing up in Moscow in the nineteen-seventies. In Russian. Opening July 10. (Quad Cinema.)

YOO HOO, MRS. GOLDBERG

A documentary, directed by Aviva Kempner, about the radio personality Gertrude Berg. Opening July 10. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

NOW PLAYING

AWAY WE GO

Sam Mendes, working with a script by the husband-and-wife novelists Dave Eggers and Vendela Vida, has created a movie very different in tone from "American Beauty," "Road to Perdition," and "Revolutionary Road," all of which tended to imprison their American characters in restrictive visual schemes. This movie is free and easy, almost ruminative in tone, like something from the early seventies. An unmarried couple in their early thirties, Burt (John Krasinski) and Verona (Maya Rudolph), who is pregnant, struggle to figure out who they are and what they want. They travel around the country in an old Volvo, visiting friends and relatives. The vignettes are both funny and touching. With Allison Janney as an alcoholic who screams at her kids and Maggie Gyllenhaal as a pushy New Age mother whose virtue saps everyone's strength.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 6/8 & 15/09.) (In wide release.)

THE BEACHES OF AGNÈS

Starting alone on a beach, admitting the theatrical aspect of her self-presentation, the eighty-year-old director Agnès Varda sets up the serious play and heartfelt whimsy of this filmed autobiography. When, moments later, her crew strews the beach, under her exacting direction, with rickety arrays of antique mirrors, she establishes her retrospective gaze as a truth inseparable from the fictions of her imagination. Though she fulfills the rules of the genre, with a more or less chronological guided tour through the sites (in France and elsewhere) and the sights (her movies, photographs, and art projects) of her life, her main order of business is love. Her clever, freely associative set pieces spark encounters with family and long-unseen friends and guide her spoken reminiscences. The emotional core of the film is Varda's life with her late husband, the director Jacques Demy (who died in 1990), who, even now, continues to inspire her. Uninhibited about sex, generous in her affections, worldly-wise, blending solemn or tender recollections with self-deprecating antics, Varda, seemingly freed from fear and shame by age and honors, goes far beyond a tale of life lived in art and makes a work of art in its own right, one of her best—a poignant, rapturously emotional tribute to life itself. In French.—*Richard Brody* (Film Forum.)

CHÉRI

The enormous broad-brimmed hats and layered silk dresses; the double-lace curtains, velvet coverings, and ubiquitous flowers—all the externals in Stephen Frears's modestly budgeted adaptation of Colette's great novella "Chéri" feel right. The entire movie, even when it's set indoors, seems to be taking place in a bower, but a bower lit as a bedroom is lit when the evening is moving toward its passionate conclusion. And yet the picture doesn't quite come to life. Michelle Pfeiffer is an utterly beautiful woman and a good actress, but Colette is very clear about her courtesan heroine, Léa, as a physical type: at the age of forty-nine, she's plush and rounded, with magnificent shoulders. Pfeiffer, by contrast, is elegant and very slender—a twenty-first-century, much exercised body lying in a Belle Époque bed. As for the pale and handsome Rupert Friend, he has, as Chéri, the sulky self-absorption that Colette described and that Léa loves (she wants a beautiful boy, not a grown man), but the thin-lipped Friend is so cranky and silly that he's actually somewhat dislikable. Colette's tender irony is that these two rather useless people fall seriously in love, but the casting prevents us from feeling the bittersweet emotions that she evoked. With Kathy Bates as Léa's raucous and envious courtesan friend.—*D.D.* (In limited release.)

FOOD, INC.

Robert Kenner's documentary is an angry blast of disgust aimed at the American food industry. It seems that the use of (heavily subsidized) corn as a cheap universal feed for chickens, for cows, and even for fish, not to mention the corn products that seep into candy, soft drinks, cheese, and almost everything else, has made that particular package of starch nearly inescapable. Kenner has many outrageous things to tell us about industrial food, but the picture is perhaps most upsetting when we get a glimpse (largely from footage shot surreptitiously by workers) of the way animals are now raised. Chickens, for instance, never see daylight, but are mostly kept in long, dark, stifling sheds where they stand in their own waste, fatted with corn until they are slaughtered, in a mere forty-nine days. Cows are also jammed together in enormous pens, many of them sick from feed that violates a digestive system built for grass. Eric Schlosser, the author of "Fast Food Nation" (2001), and Michael Pollan, who wrote "The Omnivore's Dilemma" (2006), lay out the case with devastating authority, and, after watching a number of farmers and rebels who fight the system, one comes out of the movie in a state of admiration and rage.—*D.D.* (6/29/09) (In limited release.)

THE HANGOVER

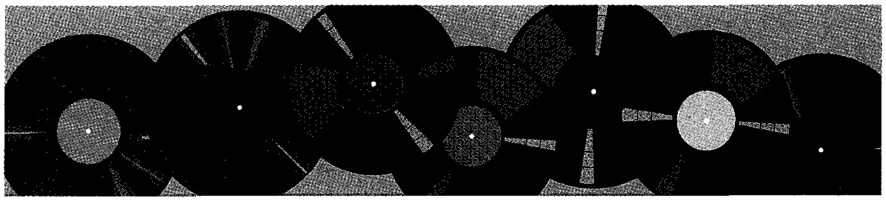
Three friends (Bradley Cooper, Ed Helms, and Zach Galifianakis) have to reconstruct, after an alcohol-induced group memory loss, a wild bachelor party where they lost the groom (Justin Bartha). After waking up in a trashed Las Vegas hotel suite, the three lead characters come across a host of madcap surprises on their way to solving the mystery, and their director (Todd Phillips) has a natural, unfussy style that allows the actors plenty of room to riff energetically through their parts (Cooper is especially good). The movie's episodic nature is not perfect (there's a fey Asian gambler who's the brunt of cheap gags), but what makes this bromance work is the performers' contagious camaraderie. With a sunny Heather Graham sweetening the mix.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

THE HURT LOCKER

Over and over, Staff Sergeant William James (Jeremy Renner) walks to a bomb site in a heavy protective suit and tries to figure out how to pull apart the clumsily tangled wires and flimsy triggering devices of an I.E.D. (improvised explosive device). The two other members of James's team, the frightened young Eldridge (Brian Geraghty) and the wary, experienced Sanborn (Anthony Mackie), jerk their guns this way and that, covering him and screaming at anyone who moves. Kathryn Bigelow's movie is set in Baghdad in 2004, and it brings us, from its particular angle, closer to the dangers of the war than any other movie about this conflict. Bigelow keeps the space tight and coherent: no matter how many times she cuts away, you know exactly where James is in relation to the bomb—whether he's in the kill zone or far enough away to be safe (you can't break up the integrity of space when space is the subject of your movie). The movie is almost unbearably tense—it's a considerable achievement. With Guy Pearce and Ralph Fiennes in small roles. Written by Mark Boal.—*D.D.* (6/29/09) (In limited release.)

MOON

The first full-length from the British director Duncan Jones stars Sam Rockwell and Sam Rockwell, with a cameo by Sam Rockwell; such is the occupational hazard, perhaps, of any film set in a future where cloning is common practice. Rockwell is among the most lively and affable of current stars: a good thing, too, given the amount of time



STEVE POWERS

POP NOTES
AT THE HELM

When the Band disbanded, its members went on to solo careers of limited distinction. Robbie Robertson released a series of increasingly self-conscious albums. Rick Danko and Richard Manuel entered periods of drug trouble and then exited life. Garth Hudson soldiered on as a valued sideman. The post-Band lull was most perplexing for Levon Helm. If Helm was not the face of the group—it was at once faceless and multifaceted—he was arguably its voice; his vocals anchored such hits as "The Weight" and "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down." Helm released a series of quiet solo records in the late seventies and early eighties, dabbled in acting, participated in a brief Band reunion, and battled cancer. His live music career rolled on (his Midnight Rambles in Woodstock are legendary), but he seemed finished as a recording artist.

Then, in 2007, Helm surprised everyone with "Dirt Farmer," an album of traditional and contemporary folk compositions that benefitted from being both trendy (many aging rock stars were revisiting the music that first inspired them) and excellent. Helm's voice was weaker, but his conviction was strong. Now he has a companion record, **"Electric Dirt"** (Vanguard). Made largely with the same crew as its predecessor—including the guitarist and producer Larry Campbell and Helm's daughter Amy—the set finds Helm both affirming life and anticipating death. Randy Newman's "Kingfish" is a song the Band should have done, as is the Grateful Dead's "Tennessee Jed." Much is raucous, though there are sombre ballads that look directly into the great unknown. The constant throughout is Helm's subtly spectacular singing. When he was young, he sounded like a wise old man. Now he sounds like an oracle.

—*Ben Greenman*

he spends onscreen, and the loneliness with which he has to contend. He plays Sam, an astronaut who is nearing the end of a three-year stint on the lunar surface, where he manages the mining of helium-3, a precious substance that will save the planet Earth. On a routine inspection, he crashes his vehicle, and wakes up in the infirmary; from that point on, the film traces the fragmentation of his sanity, his being, and, worst of all, his employment prospects. He is stuck with himself, and so are we. The over-all design is a clear homage to "2001: A Space Odyssey," not just in the soothing tones of the onboard computer—voiced here, with a sliver of menace, by Kevin Spacey—but also in a willingness to disengage from the mechanism of plot and turn instead, as Kubrick did, to the vaporous metaphysics of the otherworldly. Jones, like his hero, has mastered a complex task—but the story he has to tell is lost in space.—*Anthony Lane* (In wide release.)

NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM: BATTLE OF THE SMITHSONIAN

The plot is nominal. It's barely a premise; it's more like a shelter. Ben Stiller is back together with his beloved stuffed and wax figures and other statues, miniatures, and artifacts—only not at the American Museum of Natural History this time, but in the basement of the Smithsonian (which includes a mockup of the National Gallery). After dark, the figures come to life, and the result is pretty much a free-form traffic jam in which everyone fights everyone else. There is, however, the great Hank Azaria as the wannabe Egyptian pharaoh Kahmunrah. His powerful arms emerging from his battle dress, Azaria, channelling Boris Karloff, speaks in a prissy, vaguely English accent, and with a lisp. When people insist on calling his war costume a dress, he becomes agitated. "It's a tunic," Azaria says, irritably shaking his fly-whisk sceptre, or *nekhakha*. "Tunic."—*D.D.* (6/8 & 15/09) (In wide release.)

QUIET CHAOS

Antonello Grimaldi's touching and original study of isolation and grief chronicles the way that an intelligent man, Pietro Paladini (Nanni Moretti), a media executive refusing solace from religion or therapy, deals with the sudden death of his wife in a freak accident. Devoted to his ten-year-old daughter, he camps outside her school all day long, ignoring the important merger his company is involved in. He gives himself over not to mourning but to building a new, grounded life from many individual acts of observation and judgment. He sees all his intimates differently—either as neurotic and dishonest or as surprisingly benevolent. Moretti (himself a notable writer-director) dominates every scene; he has the unique quality of never being boring despite doing very little. A startling erotic episode serves as a kind of return to life. Moretti, Laura Paolucci, and Francesco Piccolo adapted Sandro Veronesi's novel. With Alessandro Gassman, Valeria Golino, and Isabella Ferrari. In Italian.—*D.D.* (IFC Center.)

SÉRAPHINE

One of the loveliest and most sombre fables of a lonely artist's ecstasy. Séraphine Louis (Yolande Moreau), a stolid housekeeper in the old town of Senlis, north of Paris, paints secretly at night in her room. A fastidious German-born art dealer and critic, Wilhelm Uhde (Ulrich Tukur), in retreat from Paris, discovers her before the First World War and champions her work as "modern primitivism." The movie, based on a true story, has been made with great respect for the privacy of this odd pairing, but it doesn't sidestep Uhde's emotional difficulties as a gay man or Séraphine's enthralled immersion in nature, her pride and isolation, and her eventual insanity. The colors are on the sober side; the pace is even, slow, weighted, and very satisfying. The writer-director, Martin Provost, wants us to feel what Séraphine feels when the wind strikes her face. The cinematography is by Laurent Brunet; the movie won seven Césars.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

STAR TREK

A new beginning, of sorts, for a franchise whose vision of the future seemed lost in the past. The director, J. J. Abrams, warps back to the early days not only of Kirk (Chris Pine) and Mr. Spock (Zachary Quinto) but of the U.S.S. Enterprise herself. Kirk overcomes his rebellious streak—signalled very clearly, for the hard of understanding—to take command of the ship as she flames into combat against the spidery craft of Captain Nero (Eric Bana), who has already jump-started the movie by wiping out Kirk's dad. There is no shortage of time-leaps here, including a jumbled subplot about what might have happened, which involves a longish cameo from a cadaverous Leonard Nimoy. (It's unclear whether non-devout viewers will relish his presence, given that Quinto does such a serene and thoughtful job.) The action scarcely halts for breath, let alone for common sense, and the scene of a ship-to-planet free fall already ranks among the treasures of the headlong; what the movie gains in ardor and cockiness, however, it loses in charm, and the result is much easier to gawp at than to love. With Bruce Greenwood, the nimble-witted Simon Pegg (in the role of Scotty), and a graying Winona Ryder as Spock's mother—how old does that make you feel?—*A.L.* (5/18/09) (In wide release.)

THE TAKING OF PELHAM 1 2 3

For the fourth time, the director Tony Scott teams up with Denzel Washington—a conjunction that has already brought us "Crimson Tide," "Man on Fire," and the fragrant "Déjà Vu." As pairings go, it's not quite up there with Ingmar Bergman and Liv Ullmann, but there's still time. Washington, playing a dispatcher on the New York subway system, finds himself negotiating with a hijacker (John Travolta) who has taken over a train and is now demanding a ransom (a paltry ten million bucks, which tells you that a twist is on the way). The dispatcher, having started out as a klutz who is so ordinary that he wears a tie and a sleeveless sweater, morphs into an action hero, which is just one of a cluster of wild implausibilities that crowd out the cogency of the film. The framing and editing will be familiar from a thousand music videos, whereas the motions of colliding police cars—as seen during a wild ride through the city—will be unfamiliar to anyone versed in the laws of physics. There was an earlier version, in 1974, with Walter Matthau and Robert Shaw. They looked embedded in their grimy, downbeat roles, whereas the stars of Scott's film seem to be fooling with the whole setup; they know it's a joke, and they want us to know it, too. With James Gandolfini as the mayor of New York.—*A.L.* (6/22/09) (In wide release.)

TERMINATOR SALVATION

The title is unfortunate, giving the impression—which is more than borne out by the film—that something must be done to save the franchise. The rescue attempt is hindered, not helped, by the efforts of the director, McG, and his writers, John D. Brancato and Michael Ferris, all of whom, together with the star, Christian Bale, assume that the project is one of the utmost solemnity; anything approaching a laugh, or even fun, is gunned down without remorse. Bale plays John Connor, the leader of the human resistance against the wicked techno-reign of Skynet. Other fighters include Connor's father (Anton Yelchin), a resurrected killer from the past (Sam Worthington), and a child sidekick (Jadagrace) who is cute, mute, and of no use whatsoever to the plot. Bryce Dallas Howard plays Connor's pregnant squeeze, thus adding to the list of roles that waste her bewitching skills. As with the previous film in the series, the one engaging scene is a chase involving high speeds and heavy machinery; the rest of the tale is a slog, and even the Terminators look as if they could do with a fresh set of batteries and an oil check. With a brief cameo by a C.G.I. version of Arnold Schwarzenegger; or maybe this *is* him, and the virtual one is governing California.—*A.L.* (6/1/09) (In wide release.)

TETRO

Francis Ford Coppola's intense personal investment in the subject of this drama, set in Argentina, is its strength as well as its big problem. He clearly cares deeply about the title character (Vincent Gallo), a writer living in Buenos Aires, who had been the darling, and is now the whipping boy, of a dominant local critic. Tetro's girlfriend says he's "like a genius but without enough accomplishments," and he has settled into a freewheeling but unsatisfying routine of bohemian turmoil. The arrival of his long-lost younger brother, Benny (Alden Ehrenreich, a pale and determined young man reminiscent of Leonardo DiCaprio), conjures up the bad memories of earlier family life that caused Tetro to travel far and refuse

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK HOLLAND TUNNEL

The Museum of the City of New York celebrates the four-hundredth anniversary of the settlement of the original Dutch colonies in New York with an exhibition of works by twelve Dutch photographers, nearly all of whom travelled to the city to explore our shared history. The result, "Dutch Seen: New York Rediscovered," is, inevitably perhaps, a hodgepodge—uneven but vivacious and full of feeling. Most of the photographers selected by the curator, Kathy Ryan, chose to focus on people, establishing an emotional common ground. Rineke Dijkstra's Coney Island bathers, Hellen van Meene's young girls, barefoot on trash-strewn streets, Morad Bouchakour's jostling constellation of fascinatingly ordinary citizens, and Arno Nollen's grid of close-up head shots all capture the combination of fragility and flintiness that the city values most. Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin's studio portraits of local celebrities (Lou Reed, Mia Farrow, Björk) are considerably cooler and more theatrical, but Charlotte Dumas warms things up again with her studies of shelter dogs, photographed with such tenderness and formal rigor that the mutts all but steal the show.

—*Vince Aletti*

CHARLOTTE DUMAS, "UNTITLED (FROM SERIES HEART OF A DOG)" (2009)/MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

contact. But the emergence of dark secrets goes hand in hand with an artistic breakthrough, a triumphant comeback, emotional healing, and family reconciliation. The element of wish fulfillment is inescapable: Coppola-the-director's intense emotional command of actors and scenes is overwhelmed by Coppola-the-writer's dictates, which are both closed off to outer reality and deal all too obliquely, allusively, and selectively with the filmmaker's own identity and history. The result is a work that is both frustratingly hermetic and strangely impersonal. In English and Spanish.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

UP

A grouchy old guy, Carl Fredricksen (voiced by Ed Asner), balloons attached to his house, flies off to the South American wilderness, with an unwanted stowaway aboard—a little round-faced chubby Wilderness Explorer in shorts, Russell (Jordan Nagai), who is afraid of nothing. This animated comedy from Pixar is being distributed in both 2D and 3D versions; the third dimension adds palpability to the characters. Carl has a square, blocky head and a blocky body; the boy has a circular face with a bump for a nose. Neither of them is very big, but they look solid, weighted. When the characters fly through the air, the space becomes an actual medium, not a dead zone. The team of Pete Docter and Bob Peterson, who wrote and directed, keep their eye on the story and on the bond between the old man and the boy. For them, 3D is a narrative tool, a delightful enhancement of what had to be strong to begin with, or it wouldn't work. Warmly emotional, the movie is also filled with inexplicably funny jokes. A complete triumph, even an instant classic.—*D.D.* (6/8 & 15/09) (In wide release.)

THE WAYWARD CLOUD

It starts with a couple in bed doing odd things with a watermelon—and then it gets strange. The story concerns a lonely young woman in an oppressively large and quiet Taipei apartment block who dreams of love, and a man who stars in the hard-core porn movie that a video crew is taping on the floor above. Over the course of the film, the two protagonists will, so to speak, come together. The director Tsai Ming-Liang's attitude toward sex is provocatively adolescent and mechanical, but if it's unclear whether the emotional void at the film's center is his own or merely his characters', his attitude toward storytelling is clear: the grotesque money shots that punctuate the action, such as it is, are stand-ins for the ready-made resolutions of more conventional narratives. Music-video fantasy sequences of loopily choreographed Chinese pop tunes (including a version of "Sixteen Tons" set in a men's bathroom and featuring a man impersonating a penis) are inventive, their erotic triviality a fizzy substitute for a real connection. In its aggressively antic view of sex, Tsai's film is beyond good and bad. If its drama, or lack of drama, defies credibility, it must nonetheless be seen to be disbelieved. In Mandarin. Released in 2005.—*R.B.* (MOMA; July 5-6.)

WHATEVER WORKS

The new Woody Allen film stars Larry David as Boris Yellnikoff, an irate New Yorker who once had a beautiful wife and a serious reputation as a physicist. (Or so he tells us, talking straight into the camera.) Now he has a lousy apartment, no job—unless you count chess tutoring—and nobody to share his life with except for a few cronies. How that downfall came about would have made an engaging story in itself, but Allen passes it by, preferring to focus on the sweet, tractable, and altogether fantastical Southern teenager (Evan Rachel Wood) whom Boris finds sheltering on his doorstep, takes reluctant pity on, and weds. We half-expect her to change his ways, but the grumpiness in Boris runs deep; instead, we follow her path into infidelity, as well as the arrival of her despairing parents (Patricia Clarkson and Ed Begley, Jr.) to the city. The movie is nimble enough at tracking their various transformations—Clarkson is the best thing in the film, a gust of bright colors and comic verve—but, even as the script makes fun of the out-of-towners, there is something stiff and encrusted about its own assumptions. There was a time when the half-happy ending of an Allen movie felt stirring and hard-earned, but the collective felicity that descends at the end of this project is more of a flimsy dream.—*A.L.* (6/22/09) (In wide release.)

WHEN WE WERE KINGS

Athletic feats are often described as poetry in motion; a Muhammad Ali fight, good or terrible, was an act of imagination that he worked out before our eyes. That was never more the case than with his most astonishing triumph, the Rumble in the Jungle—his October 30, 1974, title bout with George Foreman in Kinshasa, Zaire—which is the subject of the producer-director Leon Gast's exuberant and thrilling documentary. Gast has the help of one of Ali's biographers, Thomas Hauser, as well as the eyewitnesses Norman Mailer and George Plimpton, who appear in period clips and later interviews. They remind us that many sportswriters considered the thirty-two-year-old Ali hopelessly mismatched against the much younger Foreman. We get to hear Mailer describe Foreman punching an indentation the size of a watermelon into the heavy bag, and then we see Foreman doing it; you understand why Ali, walking into the same palatial training hall in President Mobutu's compound, kept his eyes averted from this ominous spectacle. Gast's greatest coup is to show how Ali was able to transform his public persona, and his mojo, into formidable weapons against Foreman in the ring. Released in 1997.—*Michael Sragow* (BAM; July 7.)

Also Playing

DEAD SNOW: In limited release. **MY SISTER'S KEEPER:** In wide release. **THE PROPOSAL:** In wide release. **THE STONING OF SORAYA M.:** In limited release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—Special screenings. July 3 at 8 and July 4 at 6: "Willie Nelson's 4th of July Celebration" (1979, Yabo Yablonski). ♦ July 11 at 6 and 8:30: "Triumph of the Will" (1934-35, Leni Riefenstahl). ♦ July 12 at 6 and 8: "The Flowers of St. Francis" (1949, Roberto Rossellini; in Italian with no subtitles; English synopsis available).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"BAMCinemaFEST." July 1 at 6:15: "The Royal Tenenbaums" (2001, Wes Anderson). The screening will be followed by a discussion with the director Arnaud Desplechin and the film critic Kent Jones. ♦ July 1 at 9:30: "Mississippi Mermaid" (1969, François Truffaut; in French). The film will be introduced by Desplechin. ♦ July 2 at 6:30: "Dead Man" (1995, Jim Jarmusch). ♦ July 2 at 9:30: "Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan" (1972, Yuen Chor; in Mandarin). ♦ Afro-Punk Festival. July 3 at 2 and July 8 at 4:30: "Adjust Your Color: Petey Green" (2008, Lauren Mendell) and "Faubourg Treme: The Untold Story of Black New Orleans" (2008, Dawn Logsdo). ♦ July 3 at 4:45 and July 6 at 4:30: "A Man Named Pearl" (2006, Scott Galloway and Brent Pierson). ♦ July 3 at 6:50: "Eventual Salvation" (2008, Dee Rees). ♦ July 3 at 9:30: "Favela Rising" (2005, Matt Mochary and Jeff Zimbalist) and "Hoods to Woods" (2009, Brian Paupaw). ♦ July 4 at 2: "The Anderson Platoon" (1967, Pierre Schoendoerffer) and interviews with the Black Panther leader Fred Hampton. ♦ July 4 at 4:30: "Crips and Bloods: Made in America" (2008, Stacy Peralta). ♦ July 4 at 6:50: "Afro-Saxons" (2008, Mark Currie and Rachel Wang). ♦ July 4 at 9:15: "Attica" (1974, Cinda Firestone). ♦ July 5 at 2: "Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop: We Cut Heads" (1983, Spike Lee) and "Making 'Do the Right Thing'" (1989, St. Claire Bourne). ♦ July 5 at 4:30: "A Huey P. Newton Story" (2001, Lee). ♦ July 5 at 7:30: "Do the Right Thing" (1989, Lee). ♦ July 6 at 6:30: "Revolution '67" (2007, Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiorno). ♦ July 6 at 9:15: "Afro-Punk" (2003, James Spooner) and "White Lies Black Sheep" (2008, Spooner), introduced by the director. ♦ July 7 at 4:30: "When We Were Kings" (†). ♦ July 7 at 6:50: "What's on Your Plate?" (2009, Catherine Gund). ♦ July 7 at 9:30: "The Night James Brown Saved Boston" (2008, David Leaf). ♦ July 8 at 7: "The Two Towns of Jasper" (2002, Whitney Dow and Marco Williams). ♦ July 8 at 9:40: "Medicine for Melancholy" (2008, Barry Jenkins). ♦ In revival. July 10-12 at 4, 6:45, and 9:30 and July 13-16 at 6:45 and 9:30: "Mississippi Mermaid" (1969, Truffaut; in French).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. July 1-2 at 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, and 9:50: "10 Killington Place" (1971, Richard Fleischer). ♦ July 3-9 at 1, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45, and 10: "Bye Bye Birdie" (1963, George Sidney). ♦ July 10-14 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Alien" (1979, Ridley Scott).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—"All Singin', All Dancin', All Weekend." July 3 at 10:30: "Singin' in the Rain" (1952, Stanley Donen). ♦ July 3 at 12:45: "Grease" (1977, Randal Kleiser). ♦ July 3 at 3: "Top Hat" (1935, Mark Sandrich). ♦ July 3 at 5:10: "Viva Las Vegas" (1964, George Sidney). ♦ July 3 at 7: "Ziegfeld Follies" (1946, Lew Ayers and Roy Del Ruth). ♦ July 3 at 9:15: "Cabaret" (1972, Bob Fosse). ♦ July 3 at 11:59: "Purple Rain" (1984, Albert Magnoli). ♦ July 4 at 10:15: "Meet Me in St. Louis" (1944, Vincente Minnelli). ♦ July 4 at 12:30: "The Gang's All Here" (1943, Busby Berkeley). ♦ July 4 at 2:40: "Swing Time" (1936, George Stevens). ♦ July 4 at 4:45: "The King and I" (1956, Walter Lang). ♦ July 4 at 7:15: "Love Me or Leave Me" (1955, Charles Vidor). ♦ July 4 at 9:45: "Pal Joey" (1957, George Sidney). ♦ July 4 at 11:59: "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" (1975, Jim Sharman). ♦ July 5 at 10: "Oliver" (1968, Carol Reed). ♦ July 5 at 1: "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" (1953, Howard Hawks). ♦ July 5 at 3: "An American in Paris" (1951, Minnelli). ♦ July 5 at 5:15: "On the Town" (1949, Donen). ♦ July 5 at 7:15: "Hair" (1979, Milos Forman). ♦ July 5 at 9:45: "Tommy" (1975, Ken Russell). ♦ The films of Andrei Tarkovsky. Except where noted, all films are in Russian. July 7 at 2:15 and 6:15, July 8 at 6:10, July 9 at 4:15, and July 14 at 1:15: "Meeting Andrei Tarkovsky" (2008, Dmitry Trakovsky). ♦ July 7 at 4:15 and 8:30 and July 11 at 4: "Ivan's Childhood," a.k.a. "My Name Is Ivan" (1962). ♦ July 8 at 2:15 and 8: "Andrei Rublev." (1966). ♦ July 9 at 1 and July 10 at 3:15 and 8:30: "Solaris" (1972). ♦ July 9 at 6:15, July 11 at 1, and July 12 at 8:30: "Stalker" (1979). ♦ July 9 at 9:15 and July 10 at 1 and 6:20: "The Mirror" (1974). ♦ July 12 at 6 and July 13 at 3:45 and 9: "Nostalghia" (1983; in Italian and Russian). ♦ July 13 at 1 and 6:15 and July 14 at 3:15: "The Sacrifice" (1986; in Swedish, French, and English).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—The films of Michel Piccoli. July 7 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "Belle de Jour" (1967, Luis Buñuel; in French). ♦ July 14 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "Les Choses de la Vie" (1970, Claude Sautet; in French).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Waverly Midnights." July 2-4: "A Clockwork Orange" (1971, Stanley Kubrick).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Carte Blanche: Marcus Hu and Jon Gerrans." July 1 at 7: "The Headless Woman" (2008, Lucrecia Martel; in Spanish). ♦ July 2 at 8 and July 3 at 4:30: "The Edge of Heaven" (2007, Fatih Akin; in Turkish and German). ♦ July 3 at 8 and July 4 at 8: "Time to Leave" (2005, François Ozon; in French). ♦ July 4 at 2 and July 5 at 2:30: "Before I Forget" (2008, Jacques Nolot; in French). ♦ July 4 at 5 and July 6 at 4:30: "Tropical Malady" (2004, Apichatpong Weerasethakul; in Thai). ♦ July 5 at 5:30 and July 6 at 8: "The Wayward Cloud" (†). ♦ "Critical Favorites: The New York Film Critics Circle at 75." July 3 at 7 and July 8 at 8: "Mr. Deeds Goes to Town" (1936, Frank Capra). ♦ July 4 at 4 and July 9 at 8: "Far from Heaven" (2002, Todd Haynes). ♦ July 4 at 7:30 and July 10 at 8: "Fargo" (1996, Joel Coen). ♦ July 5 at 2 and July 9 at 4:30: "The Best Years of Our Lives" (1946, William Wyler). ♦ July 6 at 4 and July 10 at 4:30: "Sideways" (2004, Alexander Payne). ♦ July 11 at 2: "Chicken Run" (2000, Peter Lord). ♦ July 11 at 5 and July 13 at 8: "La Dolce Vita" (1960, Federico Fellini; in Italian). ♦ July 11 at 8:30 and July 13 at 4:30: "Umberto D." (1952, Vittorio De Sica; in Italian). ♦ July 12 at 12:30: "Shoah" (1985, Claude Lanzmann).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." July 3 at 8: "The Magic Flute" (1975, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). ♦ July 10 at 9:30: "Sans Soleil" (1983, Chris Marker; in French).

READINGS AND TALKS

"WORD FOR WORD"
Bryant Park's reading series presents a program featuring selections from Peter Terzian's new book, "Heavy Rotation: Twenty Writers on the Albums That Changed Their Lives." Terzian will be joined by the contributors Joshua Ferris, Clifford Chase, Stacey D'Erasmo, Asali Solomon, and John Jeremiah Sullivan for a reading from the anthology. (Sixth Ave. at 42nd St. For more information, call 212-768-4242. July 1 at 12:30.)

"ADULT EDUCATION"
Carrie McLaren, the founder of this monthly lecture series, celebrates the publication of her new book, "Ad Nauseam: A Survivor's Guide to Consumer Culture," which she co-wrote with Jason Torchinsky. She'll discuss the history of subliminal advertising, and Torchinsky will talk about car-insurance advertising. The comedian David Angelo will offer his interpretation of the concept behind all contemporary advertising campaigns (which has something to do with the abandonment of personal responsibility). And the artist Heidi Cody will show her work, which deals with brand iconography. (Union Hall, 702 Union St., Park Slope, Brooklyn. 718-638-4400. July 7 at 8.)

THE HAPPY ENDING SERIES @ JOE'S PUB
The downtown music-and-reading series continues with the writers Kevin Canty, Binnie Kirshenbaum, and Nick Laird. The musical guest is Elvis Perkins. (425 Lafayette St. 212-539-8777. July 8 at 7.)

"LITERARY UPSTART"
The L Magazine's annual fiction competition, in which writers are critiqued "American Idol"-style during live readings, comes to a climax. The three winners of this season's earlier rounds, along with a wild card, face off for the grand prize of two hundred and fifty dollars and publication in the magazine. The judges are Adam Bonislawski, a contributing editor at *The L Magazine;* Aaron Petrovich, the editor of Hotel St. George Press; the literary agent Katherine Fausset; Calvert Morgan, a vice-president and the editorial director of Harper Perennial; and Ben Greenman, an editor at this magazine. (The Slipper Room, 167 Orchard St., at Stanton St. No tickets necessary. July 9 at 7.)

"WRITING THE HUDSON RIVER"
Poets House gathers the poets Nancy Willard and Mark Wunderlich and the scholars Judith Richardson and Wayne Franklin for a panel discussion and reading marking the four-hundredth anniversary of Henry Hudson's arrival in the New World. (Wave Hill, W. 249th St. at Independence Ave., the Bronx. For more information, call 212-431-7920. July 12 at 1.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

FOURTH OF JULY
A full-text version of the Declaration of Independence handwritten by Thomas Jefferson is on display at the New York Public Library through Aug. 1. The rest of the library is closed this weekend, but there are special viewing hours for this artifact July 3-5 from 1 to 5. (Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Franklin will greet visitors to the New-York Historical Society during their daylong celebration of the holiday, which also features a performance, at 2, by the master storyteller Jonathan Kruk about the role of the Hudson River in the War for Independence. Note: There is free admission for those wearing red-white-and-blue clothes. (170 Central Park W., at 77th St. 212-873-3400.) ♦ At noon on the Fourth, the nation's capacity for excess will be on display at Nathan's Fourth of July International Hot Dog Eating contest. (Corner of Surf and Stillwell Aves., Coney Island.) ♦ There's a pig roast and campout at the Queens County Farm Museum, starting at 5. There'll be music, food, beer, and children's games, such as capture the flag and flashlight tag, but you'll have to bring your own tent. In the morning, breakfast includes fresh eggs from the farm. (www.queensfarm.org.) ♦ The Macy's fireworks display moves to the Hudson River this year, in honor of the four-hundredth anniversary of its namesake explorer's arrival. Barges will be stationed from 24th to 50th St. and the show goes airborne starting about 9:20 P.M.)

NEWYORKER.COM

Visit the Goings On blog, at www.newyorker.com/go/goingson, for additional cultural coverage and commentary.

"The Big Draw," at various venues downtown.

MAXIMILIAN BODE

ON THE HORIZON

ART
MEMORY LANE
July 16-Oct. 25

The forty-four-year-old British painter Hurvin Anderson, whose scenes of Afro-Caribbean immigrants in the fifties and sixties suggest a cross between Peter Doig and David Hockney, will exhibit his work at the Studio Museum in Harlem. (212-864-4500.)

MOVIES
STAYING ACTIVE
July 17-23

Robert Kramer, who died in 1999, may well be the most important American director you've never heard of. His documentary-infused work of the nineteen-sixties and seventies dramatized the most radical political agendas of the day and also confronted activists' growing disillusionment. He kept making films after moving to France in 1980. Anthology Film Archives offers a retrospective of his work. (212-505-5181.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND
LONG LINES
July 18

"The Big Draw," an annual daylong celebration of artistic expression, features site-specific works by such artists as Suzanne Bocanegra (whose project involves audience participation and an improvised performance by the American string group FLUX Quartet) and Eve Mosher (she's designed tours in which dripping bottles of dyed water make your path the canvas). (www.drawingcenter.org.)

THE THEATRE
LATIN LOVERS
July 25

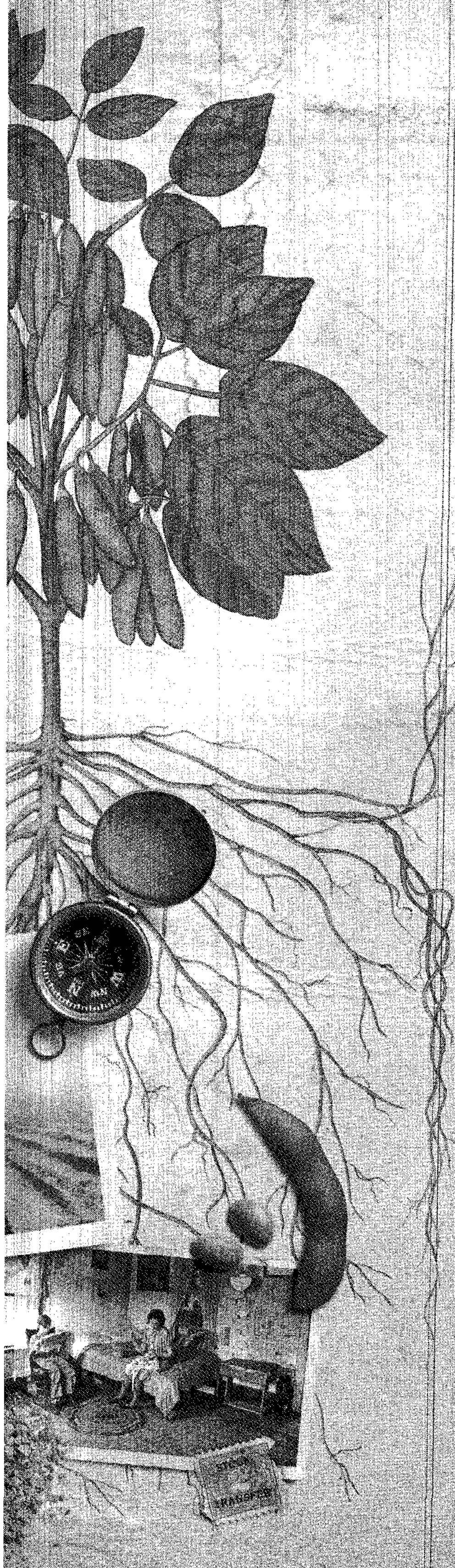
Fans of "Dancing with the Stars" and "So You Think You Can Dance" will get a chance to see how the pros do it, in "Burn the Floor." The touring show melds Latin and ballroom styles into a dance showcase created, directed, and choreographed by Jason Gilkison, at the Longacre. (212-239-6200.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
MAGYAR MADNESS
Sept. 5

Maverick Concerts uses the bicentennial of Haydn's death to feature music by composers who straddled the Austro-Hungarian divide—such as Franz Liszt, whose piano concerto "Malédiction" will be offered on the final weekend of the festival. (www.maverickconcerts.org.)

DURING THE DUST BOWL,

SOYBEANS DID MORE THAN JUST REVIVE THE EARTH. THEY HELPED REVIVE AMERICA.

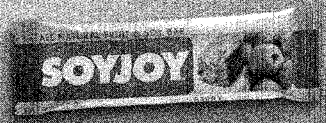


The 1930s. The Great Depression turned the land of opportunity into a land of despair. Struggling farmers, in an attempt to reap greater profits, cultivated large tracts throughout the Great Plains. This removed precious nutrients and moisture from the soil, putting a great strain on the land. Couple that with cattle overgrazing and a drought courtesy of Mother Nature, and the Dust Bowl was born.

Enter the soybean. Packed with soil-replenishing nitrogen, it gave back to the land what crops like corn and wheat stripped away. Planted in large quantities, and utilized in crop-rotation practices first developed in ancient China, soybeans helped suppress erosion and hold the ground together.

With the stabilization of the land helping to stabilize the economy, America was slowly pulled out of the Great Depression. Thanks in part to the amazing soybean—for over 5,000 years an integral part of cultures and diets.

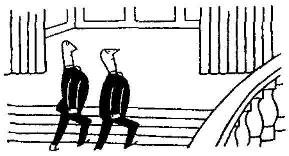
Today, it's this same historic soybean that we take, mix with fruit, and bake to make every SOYJOY.®



THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
STONEWALL PLUS FORTY



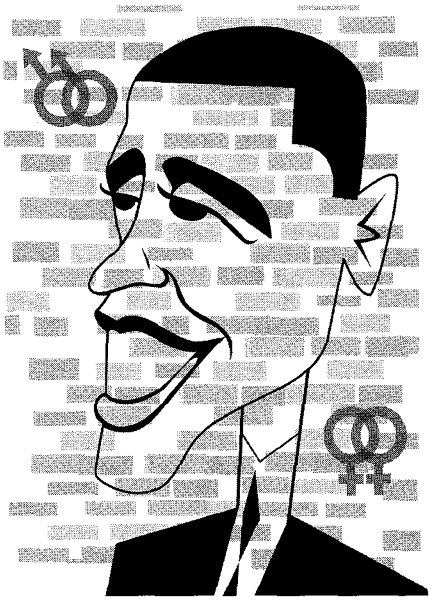
The most improbable of America's mass movements for civil rights—improbable at the time, inevitable in retrospect—got its start at a most improbable hour in a most improbable place. The hour: two in the morning, forty years ago. The place: the sidewalk in front of the Stonewall Inn, a questionable bar (as it might then have been called by persons of delicate sensibilities) on Christopher Street, in the heart of Greenwich Village. Like most such establishments, the Stonewall was more or less openly run by the Mafia; it served prodigious quantities of watered-down booze, though it had no liquor license; it dealt in cash and seldom paid taxes, unless you counted the envelopes regularly provided to representatives of the local police precinct. But none of these was the ultimate reason that the N.Y.P.D. vice squad raided the Stonewall that night. The reason was that its customers were homosexuals.

This was, so to speak, normal: such raids were a routine hazard of gay nightlife. Normally, patrons who weren't quick enough to escape unnoticed would submit meekly to arrest or humiliation. This time, they resisted. No one can say for sure why Saturday, June 28, 1969, was different, but the botched bust at the Stonewall touched off not only four nights of raucous, riotous demonstrations but also, in short order, a sustained burst of political activity aimed at making minority sexual orientation, like left-handedness or dark skin, a legally, morally, and socially neutral condition, not an impediment to full membership in the human family.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROBERT RISKO

Even in the legendarily liberated nineteen-sixties, mainstream attitudes toward homosexuality were benighted to a degree that is difficult to exaggerate. "Sodomy" between consenting adults was against the law almost everywhere. "Perversion" was a firing offense throughout the federal government, not just in the military. The American Psychiatric Association classified homosexuality as a "sociopathic" mental disorder. In the *Daily News*, gays were "homos." In 1966, three years before Stonewall, *Time*, then the voice of middlebrow, middle-class respectability, published a long essay on "The Homosexual in America." The magazine, while acknowledging that "homosexuals are present in every walk of life," concluded that homosexuality

> is a pathetic little second-rate substitute for reality, a pitiable flight from life. As such it deserves fairness, compassion, understanding and, when possible, treatment. But it deserves no encouragement, no glamorization, no rationalization, no fake status as minority martyrdom, no sophistry about simple differences in taste—and, above all, no pretense that it is anything but a pernicious sickness.



At the time of the Stonewall uprising, Barack Obama was a seven-year-old grade-schooler in Jakarta, Indonesia. This week, as President of the United States, he will welcome an assemblage of prominent gay citizens, along with their partners and, in some cases, their spouses, to the East Room of the White House for a commemoration of the movement the uprising sparked. From the perspective of forty years ago, that is remarkable enough. But just as remarkable is the fact that many of these same citizens believe that this still new President has done too little to advance their cause. They have a point.

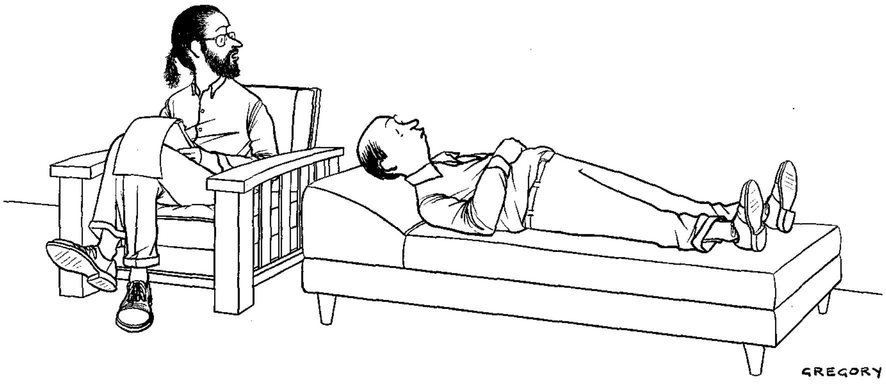
As a candidate, Barack Obama presented himself as a strong proponent of "full equality" for "LGBT people"—the current term of art, awkward but inclusive, for lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people. He promised unequivocally to end the Pentagon's misbegotten "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, under which some thirteen thousand soldiers and sailors have been cashiered for nothing more than acknowledging their sexual orientation, and to fight for the repeal of the so-called Defense of Marriage Act, which forbids federal recognition of same-sex marriages and allows states to ignore such marriages if contracted elsewhere. Although most organized gay support had gone to Hillary Clinton during the primary season, Obama took the overwhelming majority of gays' votes in November.

The President has said all the right things. But there have been signs, before the election and after, that where gays are concerned his fine-tuned ear for the emotional resonance of his actions has an alloy of tin. Choosing the conservative evangelical pastor Rick Warren to give the Inaugural invocation could be defended as a mutual gesture of civic comity. More disturbing, if less widely publicized, was the Obama campaign's use of an anti-gay gospel singer who claimed to have been "delivered" from homosexuality to entertain rallies aimed at Southern blacks. And, in the five months of the Obama Presidency, the hyperactivity that has marked the Administration's approach to the economic crisis, the health-care mess, and the Middle East has been missing on the issue of what, during the campaign, the candidate stirringly called "real equality for all Americans, gay and straight alike."

DOMA and D.A.D.T.—the Defense of Marriage Act and "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"—remain as fully in force as they were on Election Day. But what has provoked some of the President's gay supporters to speak of "betrayal" and prompted others to boycott a gay Democratic fund-raising dinner last week was a June 11th legal brief from the Justice Department defending the constitutionality of DOMA and, some charged, likening same-sex marriage to incest. With rare exceptions, and this is not one of them, Justice Department lawyers must defend existing statutes in court, even those the Administration wants to repeal. Anyway, the brief does not really suggest any moral equivalence between gay marriage and incest, a word it does not mention. (It notes, as part of a technical argument, that marriages between first cousins are legally valid in some states and invalid in others.) But nothing required Justice to build a bridge over this particular River Kwai. The brief praises DOMA as "a cautiously limited response to society's still evolving understanding of the institution of marriage" that reflects "a cautious policy of federal neutrality towards a new form of marriage." Unlimited, incautious, and hostile is more like it.

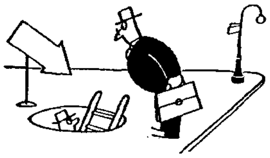
"I don't blame you for your impatience," Vice-President Biden said at the boycotted (but still lucrative) fund-raiser, adding, "I hope you don't doubt the President's commitment." A fair test of that commitment would be a quick end to the dithering over D.A.D.T. A permanent solution will require an act of Congress, and the Administration is understandably reluctant to seek one at a moment when Congress's plate is already piled to the ceiling. But the President doesn't have to wait. The Palm Center, a public-policy institute at the University of California, Santa Barbara, has made a persuasive case that he can order an immediate halt to involuntary discharges of gay servicemen and servicewomen under the same "stop-loss" law that his predecessor used, less admirably, to force soldiers to extend their enlistments. Last Wednesday, the Center for American Progress, a think tank that has provided many Obama appointees, proposed a plan whereby a stop-loss executive order would be followed by a Presidential panel on implementing repeal and, ultimately, by repeal itself. On Thursday, Robert Gibbs, the White House press secretary, seemed to dismiss the idea ("The Administration believes that this requires a durable legislative solution"), but he also seemed to leave the door ever so slightly ajar ("There could be differences on strategy"). The President should kick that door open, and if he doesn't his gay supporters and their allies should do a little kicking of their own. The community organizer on Pennsylvania Avenue will get the message.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*



"Would you care to try some of my handmade artisanal antidepressants?"

LONG, HOT SUMMER
TRACK SCHOOL



June marks the onset of what one Village resident refers to as "devil-baby season"—the time of the year when the temperature climbs and New Yorkers start doing crazy stuff. This year, the weather stayed cold, and damp. Things still got weird. On Long Island, a newborn was found in a shoebox. In Albany, the government fell apart. You didn't need to see Tony Scott's remake of the seventies classic "The Taking of Pelham 1 2 3" to be reminded that the city can be a cracked-up place.

Scott wanted the subway "to be a third character" in the movie, in which a white-collar con named Ryder (John Travolta) takes train passengers hostage and leaves it to Garber (Denzel Washington), a regular-guy dispatcher, to muster ten million dollars in an hour, or not. Scott's subway is totally recognizable (queasy light, podiatrist ads, Hasidim) and, at the same time, a little ridiculous (a major plot twist relies upon functioning wireless). He and his crew shot underground for four weeks, mostly in a "ghost tunnel"—the track for the old HH shuttle, which ran until 1946—at the Hoyt-Schermerhorn station, in Brooklyn. By the end of the production, three hundred of the film's cast and crew had graduated from the N.Y.C. Transit Learning Center's Track Safety class, earning them both the right to work on the tracks and a white plastic wallet card proving it.

"We generally do these classes with actors on a P.M. tour, when there's less of a crowd," Kevin Bress, the senior director of Track Infrastructure and Maintenance Support Training for N.Y.C.T., said, the other day, at the agency's headquarters, at 2 Broadway. The class, he explained, takes eight hours and is mandatory for anyone working on N.Y.C.T. property. Of the curriculum, he said, "The main theme of the class is teaching people how not to get hit by a train."

René Corcino, a course instructor, added, "We also identify areas that the homeless may tend to get comfortable in before the police chase them out." Other topics: the third rail, tripping hazards, how to scoot up the platform ladder from the tracks. "You have to kind of put your foot sideways," another instructor, Joseph Lupo, said.

Over the years, Corcino and Lupo have done a lot of work with entertainment people. Sometimes they're princes. Sometimes they're jerks. (Washington, Lupo said, was "all right.") "When the first train rolls past them, they become a little more responsive and have, I guess, a different respect for what goes on down there," Lupo said. To get from a classroom in Brooklyn, where the course begins, to a working tunnel, where it ends, the students—outfitted in fluorescent vests and hard hats—ride the R train.

"People on the train will be like, 'That track worker really looks like John Travolta!' " Corcino said.

"It happened to me with Mr. Cage," Lupo said. He was referring to Nicolas Cage, whom he instructed for "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," which comes out next summer. "He was a nice man. He took pictures."

Alberteen Anderson, the agency's director of Film and Special Events, said, "Angelina Jolie was in for 'Salt' a few weeks ago, and she was really down-to-earth. You have other stars who are just so nasty to T.A. employees."

Lupo wanted to talk some more about Cage, whom he taught alongside Alfred Molina—"an even bigger star than Nic Cage if you look at how many movies he's made, and, you know, the whole 'Fiddler on the Roof' thing on Broadway." Lupo continued, "Cage was especially interested in the third rail. He had this big thing about the mystical power of electricity."

Lupo said that Cage had been a "big Brooklyn and Coney Island guy."

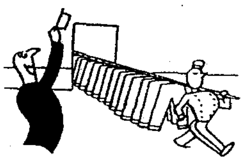
"Yeah, that was a thing with Travolta, too," Bress replied. "Taking the subway again."

Anderson added, "He was dancing on the tracks one night."

Lupo said, "When I did Cage, he suggested that I see his current movie, 'Knowing,' because there's a subway scene in it and it has a very horrific crash that was completely re-created in a studio in California." Lupo and his colleagues had found the scene dubious: people get sucked under the tracks ("Totally unrealistic"); the car body cuts loose from the wheels and slides along the platform ("That cannot happen"). Someone said, "Did anyone ask how the Pelham local got to Coney Island?" The instructors shook their heads, as if to say, Stranger things have happened.

—*Lauren Collins*

DEPT. OF HOOPLA
STAIN GANG



The custom cleaning company Madame Paulette—removers of all kinds of stains, but especially very expensive ones—turned fifty this year, and its owner, John Mahdessian, threw a party in the foyer of the company's new flagship location, at Second Avenue and Sixty-sixth Street, to celebrate. A problem came up in the planning stages: Madame Paulette's foyer is not huge, and Mahdessian was worried about crowding. "These are V.I.P.s," said Mahdessian, who has dry-cleaned items for Meryl Streep, Anna Wintour, James Gandolfini, Barbara Walters, Naomi Campbell, Billy Crystal's mother, and David Copperfield (he sent in his collectible dolls). "They wouldn't enjoy being at the kind of party where you can't even walk through the place." He decided to host three parties, on consecutive nights, each with a different guest list.

The last celebration was on a Wednesday. A black carpet, velvet ropes, and a gaggle of paparazzi greeted guests as they arrived. A display window showed off a little TV, which played footage of Madame Paulette workers cleaning Princess Diana's dresses and vacuuming the interior of Donald Trump's airplane. Inside, people exchanged dry-cleaning horror stories over thumping disco music.

"It was about five years ago," the designer Dennis Basso, a large man in a gray suit, said. "I was having lunch at San Lorenzo in London with our dear friend Joan Collins, and as I was telling a story in a most explicit manner she was raising her hand, to drink from a glass of red wine." The climax is often the same in these stories: Basso accidentally whacked the glass; the wine went all over Collins. "She was in cream suède," he went on. "She handled it like a pro. She got up, took her shawl, and went to the ladies' room, and her husband followed with a full bottle of Pellegrino. They returned ten minutes later, and she had the shawl wrapped around her."

The real-estate broker Faith Hope Consolo, who wore pink, had a red-wine story, too: white Valentino dress; interior-decorating awards ceremony in Los Angeles. "The spill happened while I was going up to the stage," she said. "So I grabbed a tablecloth, wrapped it around me, and that is how I accepted the award." Donna Spinillo, a HUB International broker, was talking ink: "I was at Cipriani's at a benefit, and the Jets were there. I had a hat that I wanted them to autograph. And at the end of the night, of course, the pen I used opened up." Matthew Schuster, a vice-president of investments at U.B.S. and a Madame Paulette customer, said, "Bankers tend to get tie stains. They like to eat a lot."

For all the silks and pima cottons in the room, the things that marred them—blood, grease, hot sauce—were relatively ordinary. One of the lessons of the evening was that stains are a great leveller. Gregory Lefian, who handles Madame Paulette's interior cleaning service (there is a twenty-four-hour hotline) had just returned from an Upper East Side town house ("Baby poop all over a beautiful silk headboard"). He said that most of his visits are prompted by two culprits: "dogs and vomit." Maggie Norris, who designed the white shirt that Michelle Obama wore on the President's hundredth day in office, mentioned her Yorkshire terrier, Master Tim, who'd just soiled a beloved silk riding jacket. The P.R. man R. Couri Hay talked about a pair of Cavalier King Charles spaniels, Cornelia and Brook, and “a Versace blanket that I got at an auction at the Whitney Museum.”

Michelle Pizzurro, who works for the designer Norma Kamali, brought up self-tanner. “People don't tan anymore,” she said. “We get bathing suits returned covered in makeup and fake bronzer.”

Mahdessian was outside, having a cigarette. He wore a pin-striped suit, and his shirt was open to reveal chest hair. He was dispensing stain wisdom. For instance, your party-survival tricks are useless: “Seltzer water is just carbonation; it doesn't do too much. Salt just acts as an abrasive.” He went on, “There's two types of ways to remove a stain: mechanical action and chemical reaction.” For these, you need either an emergency stain-removal kit (Madame Paulette happens to sell one), or, of course, a good dry cleaner.

—*Lizzie Widdicombe*

POSTSCRIPT
MICHAEL JACKSON

The news of Michael Jackson's death arrived late on Thursday afternoon, and the great outpouring of celebrity eulogies began immediately. Steven Spielberg: “His talent, his wonderment, and his mystery make him legend.” Beyoncé: “He was magic.” John Mayer: “I truly hope he is memorialized as the '83 moonwalking, MTV-owning, mesmerizing, unstoppable, invincible Michael Jackson.” And, from France, a gracious statement came from Manu Dibango, the seventy-five-year-old African pop pioneer. He mourned the loss of “*un artiste exceptionnel, le plus talentueux et ingénieux*” (no translation necessary).

Dibango was one of countless people whose lives were changed by Jackson's music, although in Dibango's case the changing was mutual. He was born and reared in Cameroon, and was already a local favorite when he recorded a song for the Cameroon soccer team. The result was a 1972 single called “Mouvement Ewondo,” but it was the B side—“Soul Makossa,” a honking, galloping funk track—that was the real hit, in Africa, in Europe, and in America, where it came to be seen as one of the first disco records. A generation of disk jockeys learned to wield the power of the song's famous introduction: a hard beat, a single guitar chord, and Dibango's low growl. He named his song after the *makossa*, a Cameroonian dance, but he stretched the word out, played with it: “Ma-mako, ma-ma-ssa, mako-makossa.”

About a decade later, Dibango was in Paris, listening to the radio at his apartment, when he heard something familiar: those same syllables, more or less, in a very different context. The d.j. was playing “Wanna Be Startin' Somethin',” the unconventional first song from “Thriller.” It is more than six minutes long, and although the music is exuberant throughout, the lyrics aren't as silly as they first sound: paranoia (“Still they hate you, you're a vegetable/You're just a buffet, you're a vegetable”) gives way to exhortation (“If you can't feed your baby, then don't have a baby”) and, eventually, inspiration (“I believe in me/So you believe in you”). The galloping rhythm sounds a bit like “Soul Makossa,” and near the end Jackson acknowledges the debt by singing words that many listeners mistook for nonsense: “Ma ma se, ma ma sa, ma ma coo sa.” Soon, Dibango's phone started ringing. Friends and relatives were calling to offer their congratulations: Michael Jackson was singing his song! But Dibango's pride turned to puzzlement when he bought the album, only to find that the song was credited to Michael Jackson and no one else.

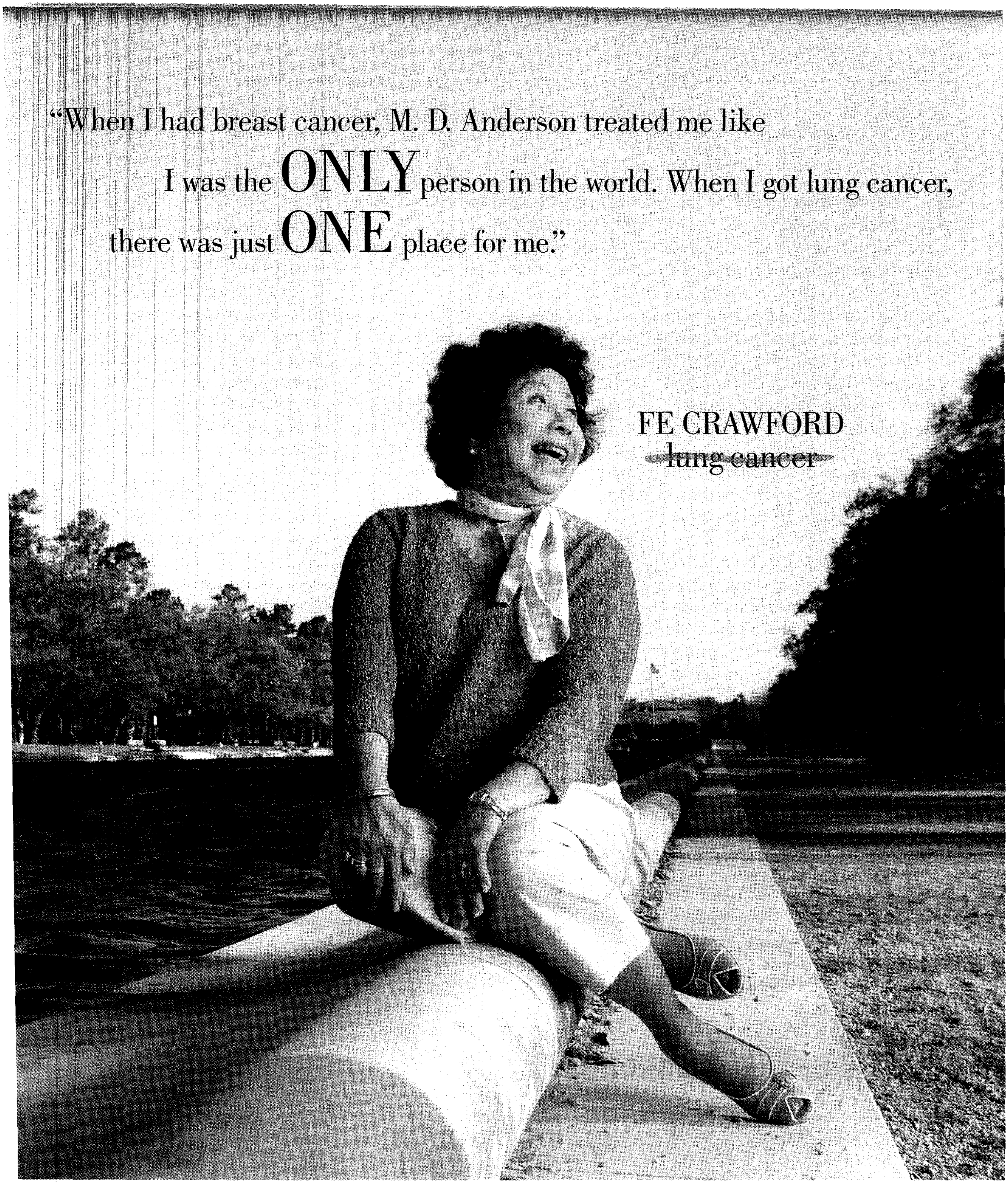
Dibango eventually worked out a financial agreement with Jackson, and he made his peace with “Thriller,” which might be (depending on how you keep score) the most popular album of all time. Jackson seemed to have made his peace with “Thriller,” too. Although he released four more albums of new music in his lifetime, all multimillion sellers, and although he also had a lifetime's worth of great songs that predated “Thriller,” he didn't seem resentful about the album that came to define him. If “Thriller” sometimes obscured his lesser achievements, it also upstaged his greatest disasters: despite the noise from the child-molestation scandals, his mutating appearance, and his escalating eccentricity, those nine songs—almost all of which were released as singles—were louder.

Jackson gradually withdrew from the Top Forty scrum, but his songs never did. In 2007, the pop singer Rihanna had a hit with “Don't Stop the Music,” which was based on “Wanna Be Startin' Something.” She sings along with the old syllables: “Ma ma se, ma ma sa, ma ma coo sa.” Once again, Dibango heard his chant on the radio, and, once again, he noticed that he wasn't given credit. (Jackson is listed as a co-songwriter, but not Dibango.) And so the process started anew. When Jackson died, Dibango was still waiting for a French court to decide whether he was owed damages for Rihanna's use of Jackson's version of Dibango's chant. When he was asked about this, Dibango replied, through his manager, that it didn't seem right to talk about it just now. His relationship with Jackson may have been complicated, but his reaction to Jackson's death wasn't: he was, he said, “very sad.”

Michael Jackson

Thursday night in New York was hot—after weeks of rain, it was one of the first real summer nights of the year. Car windows were open all over the city, and just about every station on the radio dial had switched to an all-Michael Jackson format; for the first (and, for all we know, the last) time, it felt as if absolutely everyone was listening to the same songs. Later that night, at least one bar in Brooklyn continued the celebration into the early hours of Friday. If you lived above it, you may have found yourself awake at 3 A.M., listening to a song you knew by heart: that familiar thump, that familiar chant. As Jackson and Dibango and millions of listeners discovered, you can't escape “Thriller.” But, then, why would you want to?

—*Kelefa Sanneh*



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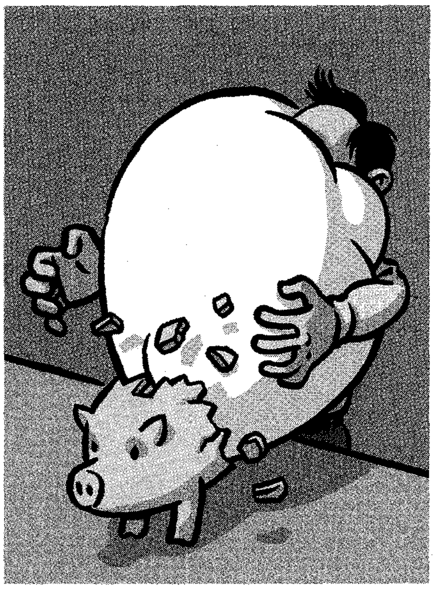
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
CAVEAT MORTGAGOR

In 1937, the Massengill Company began selling a health product called Elixir Sulfanilamide, which contained one of the antibiotic sulfa drugs. Unfortunately, it also contained diethylene glycol, a solvent that happens to be deadly to humans. In a matter of months, the elixir killed more than a hundred consumers. The next year, Congress passed the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, requiring new drugs to be proved safe before they hit the market.

That's typical of regulation in the U.S.: it often takes a public crisis for things to change. In 1906, Upton Sinclair's exposé, in "The Jungle," of grim conditions at meatpacking plants led directly to the Meat Inspection and the Pure Food and Drugs Acts. In the early sixties, news of birth defects caused by the drug thalidomide helped the passage of a bill requiring drug companies to prove the safety and efficacy of their products and to disclose potential side effects. And now the fallout from the credit bubble has led the Obama Administration to propose a Consumer Financial Protection Agency, to regulate financial products much the way the Consumer Product Safety Commission regulates bicycles and bedspreads.

The proposal has provoked a predictable backlash from the banking sector, which sees it as unnecessary (since banks are already tightly regulated) and as a recipe for government meddling. It's true that some of what we'd want such an agency to do—like rein in the excesses of credit-card companies—is already being done. But much isn't. And, as for meddling, we probably need it more in the realm of consumer finance than in the realm of toasters. With consumer goods, there are reliable third-party watchdogs, like Underwriters Laboratories and *Consumer Reports*. In finance, third parties—like debt-management services and mortgage brokers—are often conflicted at best and corrupt at worst. And buying a house is far more complex, and confusing, than picking out a refrigerator. This doesn't mean that a consumer-protection agency could have averted the current crisis—given the widespread conviction that house prices would rise forever, disaster was probably inevitable—but it might have saved some from the financial equivalent of Elixir Sulfanilamide.

Many of the problems in consumer finance stem from consumers' financial illiteracy. Studies find that a sizable percentage of consumers can't answer simple questions about compound interest and inflation, let alone questions dealing with mutual funds and bonds. The economists Victor Stango and Jonathan Zinman found that people often underestimated how much interest a stream of loan payments would amount to. Brian Bucks and Karen Pence, economists at the Federal Reserve, have shown that many people with adjustable-rate mortgages, or ARMs, simply don't know how much their interest rates could change, which generally means that they've taken on more risk than they realize. But the problem isn't just ignorance: even quite savvy consumers have trouble negotiating the thicket of options they face when trying to buy a house. The economist Susan Woodward has shown that the mortgage industry's reliance on abstruse and complex pricing schemes makes it difficult to comparison-shop effectively. That may be one reason a Freddie Mac study found that ten per cent of the people who ended up with subprime loans could have qualified for prime ones.



Consumer finance, in other words, is an industry in which keeping customers confused often seems to be a business strategy. This means that there's a chance for the state to help balance, if not level, the playing field. Requiring more transparent disclosures will be useful in some cases. But transparency isn't always enough; there are some consumer-finance products whose costs so vastly outweigh their benefits that they should probably just be banned. Take yield-spread premiums: these allow mortgage brokers to make more if they arrange loans with higher interest rates, giving them an incentive to stick their customers with more expensive loans.

The new regulations will come at a price. We'll probably see less financial innovation. The toughening of the F.D.A. rules in the wake of the thalidomide scare coincided with a sharp drop in the number of new drugs introduced, and something similar will be true for financial products. Tougher regulations will also mean some redistribution of wealth from the well informed to the less well informed, since regulations reduce the benefits of gaming the system. More important, negative-amortization loans, prepayment-penalty mortgages, and option ARMs all made it easier for people with low incomes and poor credit to buy houses, and for people to buy bigger houses than they otherwise could have. Serious regulation will mean that fewer people can buy homes. But this may not be a bad thing, given all the trouble the housing bubble caused.

In any case, the biggest danger of a Consumer Financial Protection Agency is not that it will artificially limit risk-taking. Rather, it's that giving products a government imprimatur can make people feel safer than they really are. (The economist Kip Viscusi has termed this type of problem "the lulling effect.") Regulation can help protect people from fraud and trickery, but finance will still be a place where ill-informed or reckless decisions can wreak havoc on people's lives. A consumer-finance agency is a good thing, but it would do well to teach consumers a simple lesson: if you don't understand the deal you're making, don't make it.

—*James Surowiecki*

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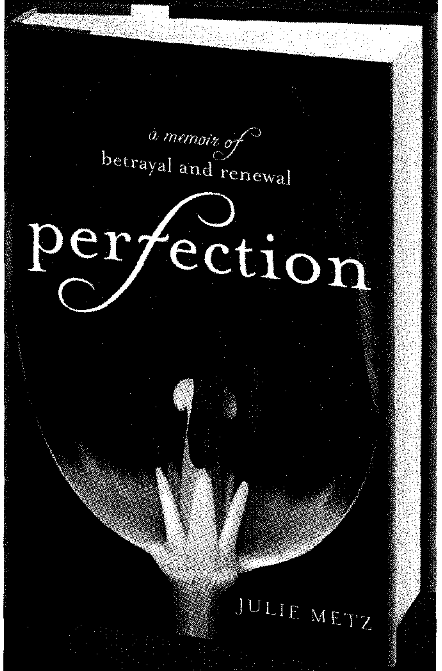

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LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

THE CONTRARIAN

Sheila Bair and the White House financial debate.

BY RYAN LIZZA

Last month, Sheila Bair, the head of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, received a Profile in Courage Award at the Kennedy Library, in Boston. Each year, the Kennedy Library Foundation presents the award to public officials who it feels have exhibited political bravery. Bair was recognized for her early, though ultimately futile, attempt to get the Bush Administration to address the subprime-mortgage crisis before it became a threat to the entire economy. One of her fellow-recipients was Brooksley Born, a former Clinton Administration official who had tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade her colleagues to regulate derivatives such as credit-default swaps. As they waited for a satellite interview with Matt Lauer, of the "Today" show, to begin, Bair and Born sat on either side of Caroline Kennedy in front of one of the library's exhibits, a replica of the Oval Office as it appeared in 1963.

The regulators couldn't compete with Kennedy. When the interview began, Lauer asked Bair and Born a perfunctory question about their roles in anticipating the financial crisis, then turned to Kennedy to ask about tabloid rumors that her children had begged her to quit New York's Senate-appointee contest, because it was "beneath" her. Bair and Born sat uncomfortably as Kennedy batted away the questions. "I'm so glad that you asked about that," she said, ending the interview. Off camera, Bair gave her a pat on the back. "You handled that well," she said, and the three women laughed.

It's too bad that Lauer didn't take the time to tell his viewers a little more about Bair. She is an unusual figure in Barack Obama's Washington. Although she has no formal training as an economist, she has worked on and off as a financial regulator in Washington for nearly two decades. In 2006, George W. Bush appointed her to run the F.D.I.C., the agency that, established during the Depression, insures bank deposits. The position has a five-year term and is usually held by an anonymous bureaucrat, but Bair has forced her way to the center of the debate over the financial crisis. Advisers with ties to New York banks have dominated both the Bush Administration and the Obama Administration, and Bair has consistently stood out for her skepticism of Wall Street and for her eagerness to confront the big banks. A Kansas Republican, she has become an unlikely hero to economic liberals, who see her as the counterweight to the more Wall Street-centric view often ascribed to Timothy Geithner, the Treasury Secretary. Since last fall, when Geithner was the president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, he and Bair have been debating about how to deal with the teetering firms that are "too big to fail"—in particular, Citigroup. This spring, Bair pressed for more structural changes at the company, which has received forty-five billion dollars in government aid, reportedly suggesting, among other things, that senior management, including the C.E.O., Vikram Pandit, should be replaced. And she has quietly urged President Obama to toughen his position on regulation. She lost that fight this month, when the Administration released its regulatory-reform plan, opting for a more risk-averse and bank-friendly approach of more closely monitoring the activities of the largest firms. But, unlike other Obama officials, who are known for stepping in line once the President has made a decision, Bair has shown that she is willing to take her fights public.

Bair, who eschews power pants suits and salon-perfect hair for a more off-the-rack and unfussy look, is fifty-five. She is married to Scott Cooper, a lobbyist for a nonprofit organization that monitors industry standards, and they have two children. Bair was born in Independence, Kansas, near the Oklahoma border. In her childhood, Independence was a town of some eleven thousand people, but its population has declined to about nine thousand. The area is heavily agricultural and economically depressed. "It's an area where people make it, but you've got to work at it," Bair told me at the Kennedy Library, before receiving her award. "It's public high schools; there wasn't anything else." Her father was a surgeon who served on the local school board and ran for the state senate; her mother was a nurse. They both grew up during the Great Depression.

Bair studied philosophy at the University of Kansas, in Lawrence, then graduated from its law school. During her college years, in the early nineteen-seventies, she worked briefly as a teller at a small-town bank, like the ones that make up the bulk of the F.D.I.C.'s membership today. She recalls with nostalgia the simplicity of banking in those years, when children learned about the magic of compound interest by using passbook savings accounts, and their parents knew the lenders by name. (She has written two children's books about the importance of saving money and borrowing responsibly.) "Everybody had a thirty-year fixed-rate mortgage back then," Bair said. "It was a ritual to come in and make your mortgage payment personally. There was a kind of pride in living up to your obligations, and, on the lender side, in making loans that people could understand and afford."

In 1978, she left Kansas to teach at the University of Arkansas law school. Her Washington career started the following year, at the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Bair has always been a Republican, as, she told me, her parents were, but she was quick to add that they were Kansas Republicans, in the tradition of William Allen White. White, who died in 1944, at seventy-five, was from the same part of Kansas as the Bairs. He owned and edited a local newspaper, the Emporia *Gazette*, which had what *Time* once called "the loudest small-town editorial voice of the U.S." He became nationally famous in 1896, after he wrote an editorial attacking the Populist movement, which was strong in his home state, especially among farmers. The article, titled "What's the Matter with Kansas?," mocked the Populists and William Jennings Bryan, who, with the support of the Populists, had been nominated as the Democratic Presidential candidate. Newspapers around the country reprinted White's piece. ("The Democratic idea has been that if you legislate to make the masses prosperous, their prosperity will find its way up and through every class and rest upon them. That's the stuff! Give the prosperous man the dickens!") It helped William McKinley defeat Bryan for the Presidency, and the Populist movement died out.

White, however, gradually moved to the left. He became a liberalizing force in the Republican Party, and in 1912 he helped Theodore Roosevelt found the breakaway Progressive Party. "I have no recollection that I ever traveled on the road to Damascus," he wrote. "But Theodore Roosevelt and his attitude toward the powers that be, the status quo, the economic, social and political order, certainly did begin to penetrate my heart." White had supported Roosevelt's anti-trust measures, and, when Franklin Roosevelt became President, the persistence of the Depression led him to support much of the New Deal. It's White's later brand of Bull Moose Progressivism that has shaped Bair's views.

It made her an odd fit in the Washington of 1981, when she took a job working for Bob Dole, of Kansas, on the Senate Judiciary Committee. Dole had run in the 1980 Presidential primaries, but was trounced by Ronald Reagan, whose win in the general election helped the Republicans take over the Senate, after twenty-six years of Democratic control. At the launch of the "Reagan revolution," when young conservatives were flocking to Washington, Bair found herself on the staff of a moderate who was trying to adjust to the new political environment. The impact was immediate: she was working on civil-rights legislation on a committee whose chairmanship had suddenly gone from Edward Kennedy to Strom Thurmond, a former segregationist. Speaking of her Republican colleagues, she said, "They didn't want to extend voting rights. They didn't want to strengthen them in any way. And, at that point in time in the country, there was still a need."

But after the 1984 elections Dole became Majority Leader, and Bair rose with him, taking top staff positions in his office. As Dole's research director during his 1988 Presidential campaign, she

Bair: a Republican regulator liberals love. Photograph by Platon.

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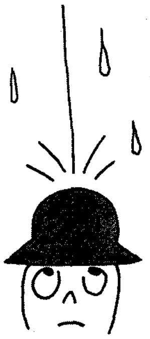
received an intense education in electoral politics. Dole was running against George Herbert Walker Bush. Ideologically, the two men were not far apart, but 1988 was the year that Lee Atwater, Bush's campaign manager, ushered in a less genteel era of political communications. Bair is still bitter about a devastating ad that the Bush campaign ran, calling Dole "Senator Straddle." She said, "We were a nice, positive campaign. They were running all these negative ads, and I still wonder now why we didn't just get back on the air and condemn those. But it didn't happen. So that was painful."



After the election, she worked briefly in Washington as a lawyer for the New York Stock Exchange. Then, in 1990, Dole encouraged her to run for an open House seat in Kansas; the district included her home town, where her parents still lived. The previous decade had been a hard one for the area. The oil economy had cratered, and the farms were steadily becoming depopulated. At her announcement speech, in Independence, Bair, then thirty-five, told the twenty-two people who had gathered to hear her, "We've been left out." She added, "We have the greatest concentration of economically distressed counties in the state. Our average income is low; our percentage of poor is high." She took her message of economic dislocation across the district, riding a bicycle with a yellow "Bair for Congress" flag, a novelty that gained her some favorable local attention. But Bair, the only woman among the six candidates in the primary, was also the only one to support abortion rights. She lost by fewer than eight hundred votes. She told me that her position caused "some controversy" but that the economy and budget deficits were more important factors, as was the financial advantage of her principal opponent—a banker. Still, it's hard to escape the fact that social issues were behind her loss: Bair once explained that her fund-raising suffered because, unlike most Republicans, she didn't have access to the donor lists of right-to-life groups. Dole later told her that she had faced another cultural obstacle in that, at the time, she wasn't married. For someone who fashions herself as an heir to William Allen White, there was an irony in her defeat. She saw up close the shift in Kansas politics from the liberal economic populism that White initially decried in "What's the Matter with Kansas?" to the conservative cultural populism that Thomas Frank described in his book "What's the Matter with Kansas?," in 2004.

In 1991, Dole helped Bair get appointed to the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, which regulates commodity futures and option markets. As a former top Republican staff member in the Senate and legal counsel to the New York Stock Exchange, she might have been expected to be sympathetic to the antiregulatory mood of both parties, but, once again, she found herself out of step, most notably when a young company known as Enron called on the C.F.T.C. to relax its regulatory grip.

Enron's implosion, in 2001, was a harbinger of the current market havoc, and its ability to perpetuate a vast financial fraud was aided by a series of deregulatory decisions that had begun almost a decade earlier. One of the first was an obscure change that the C.F.T.C. made in 1993. The three sitting commissioners voted, two to one, to exempt certain energy transactions—exchange-traded futures contracts—from anti-fraud protections, effectively removing a growing part of Enron's business from the C.F.T.C.'s jurisdiction. (Profits from the company's energy-contracts division immediately started to climb.) Bair, the one commissioner who voted against the decision, wrote an angry dissent. Shedding the technocratic language typical of regulators, she called the decision a "dangerous precedent" and mocked another commissioner's argument that firms trading in energy-futures contracts were "sophisticated" and thus didn't "need" regulation. "If we are to rationalize exemptions from antifraud and other components of our regulatory scheme on the basis of the 'sophistication' of market users, we might as well close our doors tomorrow," she wrote.

When her term at the C.F.T.C. ended, in 1995, she returned to the New York Stock Exchange, and stayed there for the rest of the Clinton era. Bair was a friend of Joshua Bolten, a fellow Senate staffer, who became George W. Bush's deputy chief of staff, and in 2001 Bush put Bair in charge of financial institutions at the Treasury Department. It was there that she began to take an interest in predatory lending, and discovered a curious trend emerging in the housing markets. Some fringe lenders were enticing home buyers to sign mortgage agreements that they couldn't afford. These so-called subprime lenders weren't brick-and-mortar banks that relied on their depositors' savings to make loans. Rather, they were financed by Wall Street speculators. Instead of simple thirty-year fixed rates, Bair noticed, the loans had hidden fees and exotic features, like low introductory rates that exploded after a few years. There was no proud ritual of the borrower stopping in to pay the mortgage once a month, because the lenders began "securitizing" the loans, packaging and selling them to Wall Street, thus severing the link between the original lender and the high-risk borrower. If the borrower defaulted, it was someone else's problem.

In reviewing the evolution of the problem with me, Bair was particularly harsh in her criticism of the Federal Reserve, then run by Alan Greenspan. She told me, "The Federal Reserve Board was really the only authority that could set lending standards across the board—banks, non-bank lenders, any mortgagor. . . . And it affirmatively did not do that." As long as housing prices continued to rise, borrowers could always refinance their loans and take out some cash, which helped fuel consumption and the economic boom. "It was hard to take the punch bowl away," Bair continued, "because even though these practices were starting to spread, and there were subsets of consumers that were getting hurt, for the most part everyone was making money, right?" She added, "The political pressure was to let it be." Bair succeeded in getting the industry to adopt a set of best practices, but the code had no enforcement mechanism and little impact.

She left the government after a year, to teach financial regulatory policy at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. But, in 2006, Bush unexpectedly appointed her to the F.D.I.C.—a government insurance company that services some eight thousand member banks, which pay premiums. When a bank fails, the insurance fund covers customers' deposits, and the F.D.I.C. takes the firm into receivership, divesting it of its bad assets and returning its healthy assets to the private sector as quickly as possible. It is a backwater agency during normal economic times, and Bair's obvious pro-consumer and pro-regulation sympathies did not seem to alarm Bush's antiregulation economic advisers. But almost immediately she turned her attention back to subprime lending, and learned that the practice had metastasized.

At Bair's direction, the F.D.I.C. bought a database of subprime loans from a company called Loan Performance in order to study the problem more closely, something that, apparently, no other government regulator had thought to do. The data were worrying. "We just couldn't believe what we were seeing," Bair said. "Really steep payment shock loans and subprimes. . . . Very little income documentation, really high prepayment penalties." In March, 2007, she initiated the first government action against a subprime lender, instructing Fremont Investment & Loan, a California bank, to cease operations. Fremont was among the worst of the subprime offenders, using all the now familiar practices: targeting people with bad credit, ignoring traditional standards for underwriting home loans, paying third-party brokers handsomely to bring in gullible customers, and then infecting the larger financial system by selling off the hazardous loans. "We ordered them out of the business," she said. "And they weren't happy about it."

Bair soon earned a reputation in the banking industry as an activist regulator who was willing to push the bounds of her agency's authority. One of her loudest public critics is Bert Ely, a consultant to financial institutions. He told me, "Quite frankly, I wish she would spend more time doing her job of running the F.D.I.C. That's an agency that needs some adult supervision, which unfortunately she is not providing." He added, "She's making a lot of enemies, particularly in the banking industry, which may not necessarily hurt her. In

"Anachronism or not, it just ain't the Fourth without the ribs and Willie Nelson."

fact, she may feel that that helps her.”

As the crisis unfolded, Bair’s interactions with the industry became increasingly antagonistic. She recalled a meeting in 2007 with a group of mortgage bankers. “They were in denial,” Bair said. “They came in and said, ‘You know, it’s kind of like the N.R.A.—people kill people, not guns! It’s not the mortgages, it’s the borrowers.’ ” Bair was convinced that the key to resolving the crisis was to get lenders to modify their loans rather than allow homes to go into foreclosure and set off a cascading effect throughout the economy. She recommended that loans scheduled to reset to unaffordable levels remain at their original rates, on the ground that a modified loan that is performing, even at a lower rate, generally costs a lender less than putting a property in foreclosure.

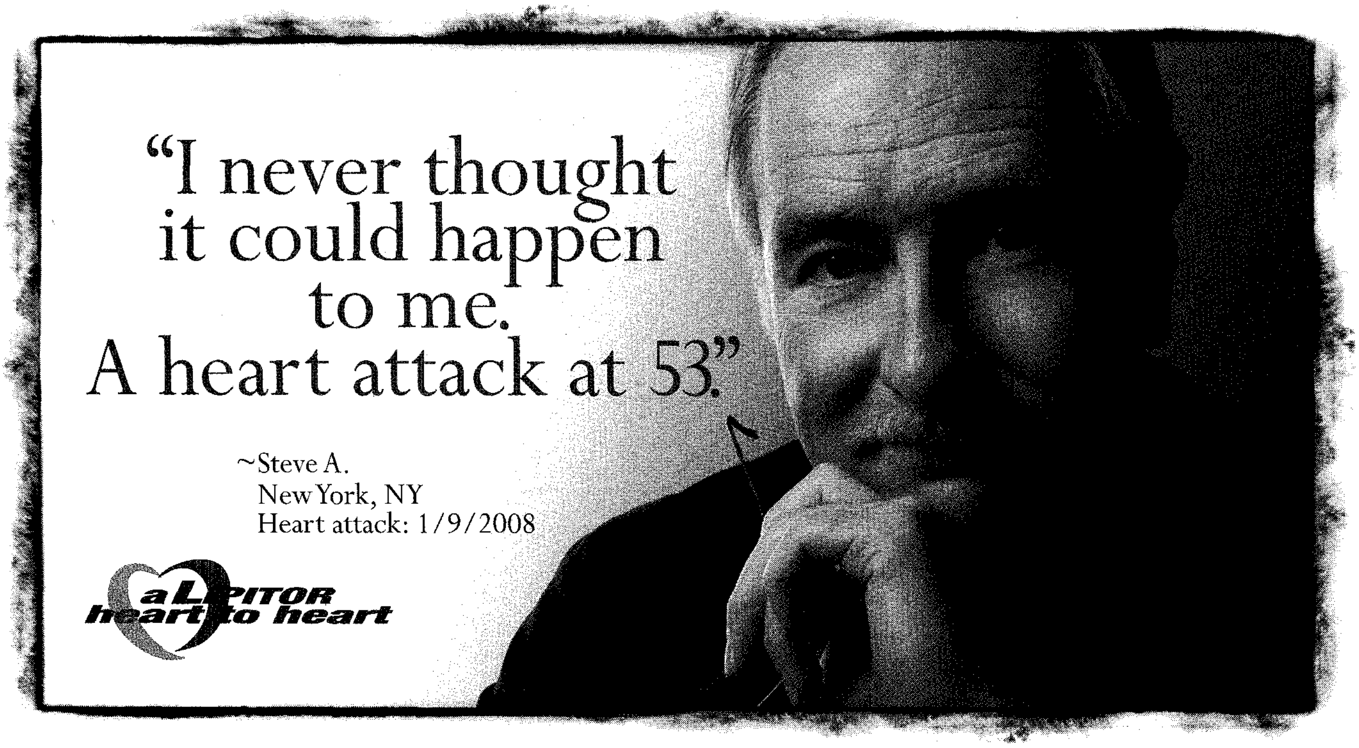
At first, Bair tried privately to nudge the industry to act. “They were telling us, ‘Don’t worry, we’re going to get these loans restructured,’ ” Bair said. “So we waited and waited and the foreclosure rates kept ticking up.” Then she decided to make her case publicly. At a mortgage-industry conference in New York on October 4, 2007, she pleaded with the audience to take action. “Moody’s recently reported that less than one per cent—less than one per cent—of subprime mortgages that are having problems were being restructured in any meaningful way,” she scolded. “We have a huge problem on our hands. . . . I think some categorical approaches are needed, and needed urgently.” That speech, perhaps more than any other action, won her the adulation of consumer groups and, eventually, the Profile in Courage Award. But the initial reaction from the audience and others was not so warm.

Within the Bush Administration, she pressed for a taxpayer-funded plan to modify loans. Her colleagues weren’t interested, and her advocacy caused a rift with Henry Paulson, Bush’s Treasury Secretary, and other officials, who believed that loan modifications wouldn’t achieve much. “Our assessment,” Phillip Swagel, Bush’s assistant secretary for economic policy in the Treasury Department, wrote recently, “was that the driver of foreclosures was the original underwriting, not the reset. Too many borrowers were in the wrong house, not the wrong mortgage.” By the end of 2008, the Administration was grappling with the effects of the crisis that Bair had first warned about seven years earlier, but her prescience was not seen as an asset. She and the Administration, she told me, “started parting company.” She had three years left in her term, and she hoped that the new Obama Administration would be more receptive to her views.

On November 24, 2008, Obama announced that Timothy Geithner was his choice for Treasury Secretary. Still at the New York Fed, Geithner was engaging with Bair over how to address the problem of failing banks, including Wachovia. Bair agreed to a deal, in late September, for Citigroup to take over the bank, which the Treasury Department and the Federal Reserve also approved. Then, reportedly, she switched her support to a much larger, last-minute offer from Wells Fargo, which Wachovia accepted. (The F.D.I.C. contends that Bair couldn’t, ultimately, object to the deal, because, unlike the Citigroup offer, it required no financial assistance from the government.) In the aftermath, Citigroup’s share price dropped by sixty per cent, sending the company into the arms of the federal government. On December 4th, Bloomberg News, citing three anonymous sources, reported that Geithner was “seeking to push Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. Chairman Sheila Bair out of office,” because she “isn’t a team player and is too focused on protecting her agency rather than the financial system as a whole.”

Geithner’s spokesperson denied that he tried to have Bair removed. Bair said, “I have tremendous respect for Secretary Geithner and have had a good give-and-take working relationship with him.” But the split quickly became a proxy for the philosophical divide over the nature of the economic crisis and the correct response to it. On the left are those who, like Joseph Stiglitz and Paul Volcker, believe that the government is propping up insolvent companies with cash infusions when it should be taking them over, selling off their bad assets, and re-privatizing them—the way the F.D.I.C. deals with a failed bank. These critics think that the government was misguided in treating bank holding companies (firms that have control over at least one bank and also have sprawling non-bank financial operations), which are regulated by the Federal Reserve, differently from small regional banks, which are regulated by the F.D.I.C. (The F.D.I.C. has used its authority to take over forty regional banks this year with no cost to the taxpayer.) The pro-Bair camp generally argues that any company that is too big to fail has an implicit guarantee of government support, which leads to reckless behavior. The liberal economist Robert Kuttner, who, as the co-editor of the *American Prospect*, had endorsed Bair for Treasury Secretary, said, “Sheila is the skunk at the picnic,” adding, “She’s the only voice on the other side of many of these issues.” But, as the head of an independent agency far from the West Wing’s inner circle, Bair has limited access to the President. She has met with him privately just once this year, on Air Force One, returning from an event in Arizona where he announced his mortgage-relief plan, modelled on the loan-modification ideas that Bair had long advocated.

Geithner and senior officials at Treasury believe that the root of the crisis was liquidity, and that struggling banks could survive roughly intact if they had a temporary injection of funds—a bailout. Besides, they argue, the government currently has no authority to take over a large bank holding company. “It’s one thing to do it with a car company, which isn’t relying on daily decisions by its counterparties,” a senior Treasury official said. “With a financial institution, if there were a long period of uncertainty, customers, counterparties, creditors, and trading partners would flee, and the ultimate bill would be substantial.” Furthermore, there is a sense that even discussing nationalization has a disruptive effect on market confidence. As vindication for their viewpoint, the Geithner supporters point to banks like J. P. Morgan Chase and Goldman Sachs, which have already returned their government money, although they appear to be motivated in part by a desire to evade the regulations that accompany government cash. Geithner’s view is even gaining some traction in Congress, which has not been a friendly place for him this year. “If somebody would’ve said . . . even three months ago that we’d be sitting near the end of June with the stock market up almost thirty per cent, with banks trying to repay some of their TARP funds, and



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Ready to start eating right and exercising more? Talk to your doctor and visit the American Heart Association at www.americanheart.org.

WHO IS LIPITOR FOR?

Who can take LIPITOR:
- People who cannot lower their cholesterol enough with diet and exercise
- Adults and children over 10

Who should NOT take LIPITOR:
- Women who are pregnant, may be pregnant, or may become pregnant. LIPITOR may harm your unborn baby. If you become pregnant, stop LIPITOR and call your doctor right away.
- Women who are breast-feeding. LIPITOR can pass into your breast milk and may harm your baby.
- People with liver problems
- People allergic to anything in LIPITOR

BEFORE YOU START LIPITOR

Tell your doctor:
- About all medications you take, including prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and herbal supplements
- If you have muscle aches or weakness
- If you drink more than 2 alcoholic drinks a day
- If you have diabetes or kidney problems
- If you have a thyroid problem

ABOUT LIPITOR

LIPITOR is a prescription medicine. Along with diet and exercise, it lowers "bad" cholesterol in your blood. It can also raise "good" cholesterol (HDL-C).

LIPITOR can lower the risk of heart attack or stroke in patients who have risk factors for heart disease such as:
- age, smoking, high blood pressure, low HDL-C, heart disease in the family, *or*
- diabetes with risk factor such as eye problems, kidney problems, smoking, or high blood pressure

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF LIPITOR

Serious side effects in a small number of people:
- **Muscle problems** that can lead to kidney problems, including kidney failure. Your chance for muscle problems is higher if you take certain other medicines with LIPITOR.
- **Liver problems**. Your doctor may do blood tests to check your liver before you start LIPITOR and while you are taking it.

Symptoms of muscle or liver problems include:
- Unexplained muscle weakness or pain, especially if you have a fever or feel very tired
- Nausea, vomiting, or stomach pain
- Brown or dark-colored urine
- Feeling more tired than usual
- Your skin and the whites of your eyes turn yellow

If you have these symptoms, call your doctor right away.

The most common side effects of LIPITOR are:
- Headache
- Diarrhea, gas
- Rash
- Constipation
- Upset stomach and stomach pain
- Muscle and joint pain

Side effects are usually mild and may go away by themselves. Fewer than 3 people out of 100 stopped taking LIPITOR because of side effects.

HOW TO TAKE LIPITOR

Do:
- Take LIPITOR as prescribed by your doctor.
- Try to eat heart-healthy foods while you take LIPITOR.
- Take LIPITOR at any time of day, with or without food.
- If you miss a dose, take it as soon as you remember. But if it has been more than 12 hours since your missed dose, wait. Take the next dose at your regular time.

Don't:
- Do not change or stop your dose before talking to your doctor.
- Do not start new medicines before talking to your doctor.
- Do not give your LIPITOR to other people. It may harm them even if your problems are the same.
- Do not break the tablet.

NEED MORE INFORMATION?

- Ask your doctor or health care provider.
- Talk to your pharmacist.
- Go to **www.lipitor.com** or call **1-888-LIPITOR**.

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some stabilization in the housing market, I think almost any economist or any market-maker would've said that was perhaps too optimistic a prediction," Senator Mark Warner, of Virginia, told Geithner at a June 18th hearing. "So while we have concerns over all . . . I think we're headed in the right direction, and I commend your leadership."

The Bair acolytes, however, point to firms like Bank of America and Citigroup, which they argue are insolvent and need to be temporarily nationalized. Citigroup remains the focus of the debate between Geithner and Bair. Geithner has reportedly defended Citigroup's managers and cautioned that the company should be given more time to execute its current turnaround plan. The New York *Post* recently summarized the dispute with a picture of Bair and Geithner dressed as characters from "Batman." Geithner "is doing a pretty good Joker impression outfoxing FDIC 'Batgirl' cop Sheila Bair, who's pushing for the busting up of ailing Citigroup," the caption read.

These debates entered into the Administration's discussions about building a new regulatory architecture. In late March, Geithner previewed for Congress some of the key concepts that Treasury wanted. The outline seemed to match the Bair camp's ideas. A new authority with the power to take over large financial institutions that posed a systemic risk to the economy was modelled on the F.D.I.C., which, Geithner suggested in his testimony, would be an equal partner with Treasury in resolving such firms if they failed. He seemed to be saying that although he and Bair may have disagreed about how to handle the current crisis, there was much more consensus about how to deal with a future one.

But in the white paper detailing the new legislation, which the Administration released on June 17th, all the new authority to regulate firms that posed systemic risk was vested in the Federal Reserve. During Geithner's testimony before the Senate, Jim Bunning, of Kentucky, echoing Bair, was incredulous. "It took fourteen years for the Fed to write one regulation on mortgages after we gave it the power to do that," he said. "What makes you think that the Fed will do better this time around?" In addition, while the March plan said that the "Secretary and the FDIC would decide" how to resolve a failing firm, the new plan said such power should "be vested in Treasury." Geithner could appoint the F.D.I.C. to do the technical work of cleaning up the firm, but between late March and mid-June—when Bair's aggressive ideas about how to handle Citigroup leaked to the press—Bair's agency had been downgraded from Treasury's equal partner to a sidekick. The senior Treasury official said that stripping authority from the F.D.I.C. had nothing to do with pressure from the banks. "Making a group decision on something that must be done really quickly is not easy," he said. "At the end of the day, someone has to have the ability to make a call, and it's better to have that authority vested in one person."

When I asked Bair about the plan, she said, "I think it reflected a lot of input from a lot of different agencies, and the private sector, and insurance and consumer groups. It's a very difficult task to try to balance all the different perspectives and come up with a package, and every compromise is going to have people who are unhappy about various parts of it. So I think it's a starting point." I said that she sounded disappointed. "I don't know if 'disappointed' is the right word," she replied.

The plan falls short of what Bair has recommended to rein in the too-big-to-fail menace. Several high-profile economists and public officials—including Volcker, Stiglitz, and Mervyn King, the head of the Bank of England—have argued recently that the government has to move beyond simply regulating such firms and start preventing them from getting too big to begin with. "I do think there's such tremendous popular discontent, and rightly so, about the hundreds of billions that have had to be infused into various institutions to keep them stable and the inequities of how the smaller institutions are dealt with versus the larger institutions," she said. She added that her ideas were more "akin to Teddy Roosevelt's trust-busting age." The day before Obama announced the plan, he told CNBC's John Harwood, "We don't want to tilt at windmills." But to Bair the windmills really are giants. ♦

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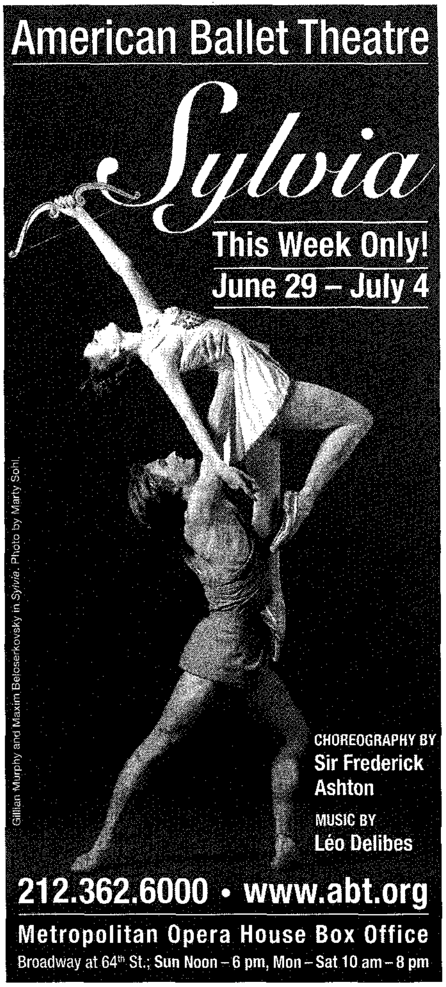
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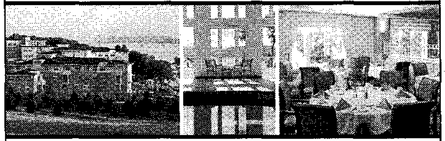
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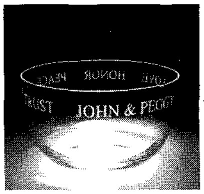
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PRIVATE THOMAS

BY YONI BRENNER

Justice Clarence Thomas has not asked a question from the Supreme Court bench since Feb. 22, 2006. . . .

"I have on many occasions or a number of occasions when things were becoming particularly routine gone down to my basement to watch 'Saving Private Ryan,' [Thomas] said. "I can't tell you why that particular movie, except we have it and it's about something important in our lives—World War II."

—*"Reticent Justice Opens Up to a Group of Students," in the Times, April 13, 2009.*

Scene:

The Supreme Court. The nine Justices, including Justice Clarence Thomas, *hear oral arguments in the main chamber. A* Lawyer *holds forth from the podium.*

Lawyer: Mr. Chief Justice, and may it please the Court: There is no question that appellate courts must retain coram-nobis power. Likewise . . .

As the lawyer continues in a monotone, Justice Thomas's eyelids begin to droop . . . lower . . . lower . . .

Dissolve To:

Normandy—June, 1944. Tom Hanks, as Captain Miller, *leads a vastly outnumbered band of American soldiers in the climactic final battle of "Saving Private Ryan." As bullets whiz overhead, Matt Damon, as* Private Ryan, *dives over a low wall, where the squad is waiting.*

Private Ryan: (*breathless*) Infantry! Fifty of 'em, at least!

Private Mellish: Jesus! They're everywhere!

Captain Miller: Steady, Mellish. We've gotta hold that bridge. (*calling out*) Reiben, Horvath! Lay down cover! Mellish, take out that tank. Ryan and I are gonna hook left and catch 'em from behind. Got it? Now let's—

Sergeant Horvath: Wait a second, sir—what about Thomas?

Miller: Thomas? Who's Thomas?

Horvath: Over there, sir.

Horvath points to Clarence Thomas, *sitting quietly near the group, in olive infantry fatigues, with an M1 helmet strapped tightly to his head.*

Miller: How long has he been there?

Horvath: He's been with us the whole time, sir. He's just very quiet.

KA-TCHOOM! A grenade explodes several yards away. Dirt rains on the squad.

Miller: (*befuddled*) You're telling me this guy has been on this mission all along and he hasn't said a single word?

Reiben: Actually, sir, he hasn't said anything since Fort Benning.

Miller: That was three years ago!

Horvath: You see, Captain, he's really more of a listener.

"Hup-hup-hup"—a German infantry unit marches behind the squad's position.

Miller: Thomas! Thomas!

Miller waves his palm in front of Thomas's eyes.

Miller: Jeez—he's like a freaking lawn ornament.

KA-CHACK! KA-CHACK! German rifles crack from the town square.

Reiben: Perhaps it has something to do with his hardscrabble upbringing.

Horvath: Or perhaps he believes that someone else will inevitably ask whatever question he's thinking of—so why waste everyone's time.

Miller: O.K. (*pause*) That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard.

THUNK-A-THUNK-A-THUNK—a German tank rolls onto the bridge.

Ryan: May I say something, Captain?

Miller: (*shrugs*) Sure—why not?

BLAM! A tank shell obliterates a steeple.

Ryan: Look, Private Thomas might not be the best soldier to serve the United States. In fact, many scholars would place him among the worst.

Thomas brushes dust off his sleeves.

Ryan: True, his nonparticipation in critical debates is bizarre and kind of unsettling; and, yes, the whole "originalism" thing seems to fundamentally misapprehend the mission of the framers, as well as the inherently dynamic character of American jurisprudence.

The soldiers exchange confused looks.

Ryan: But, sir, Private Thomas has things they don't teach in basic training. Things like poise. Integrity. Excellent posture. A completely neutral expression.

As Ryan gains momentum, the German guns go quiet.

Ryan: Although we may quibble over terms like "qualified" and "intellectually myopic," I take solace in the knowledge that nothing is irreversible; and, if history has taught us anything, it's that one American, however incompetent, can't really screw things up forever.

The soldiers nod. Miller wipes a tear.

Ryan: So whaddaya say, boys? (*chanting*) Cla-rence! Cla-rence!

One by one, the soldiers join in, until they're all chanting "Cla-rence! Cla-rence!" After a moment, the Germans drop their weapons and chime in: "CLA-RENCE! CLA-RENCE!" Music swells.

All: *Cla-rence! Cla-rence! Cla-rence!*

Justice Scalia: Clarence!

Cut To:

The Supreme Court. Justice Scalia *is shaking Thomas by the shoulder. Thomas snaps awake—the chamber is empty.*

Justice Scalia: (*gruffly*) You coming?

Justice Thomas: (*clearing his throat*) Right. Just, uh . . . deliberating.

Scalia turns away, rolling his eyes. As Thomas and Scalia exit the courtroom, they pass by Justice John Paul Stevens, *fast asleep, softly humming the theme from "I Dream of Jeannie."* ♦

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IN THEATRES THIS FALL

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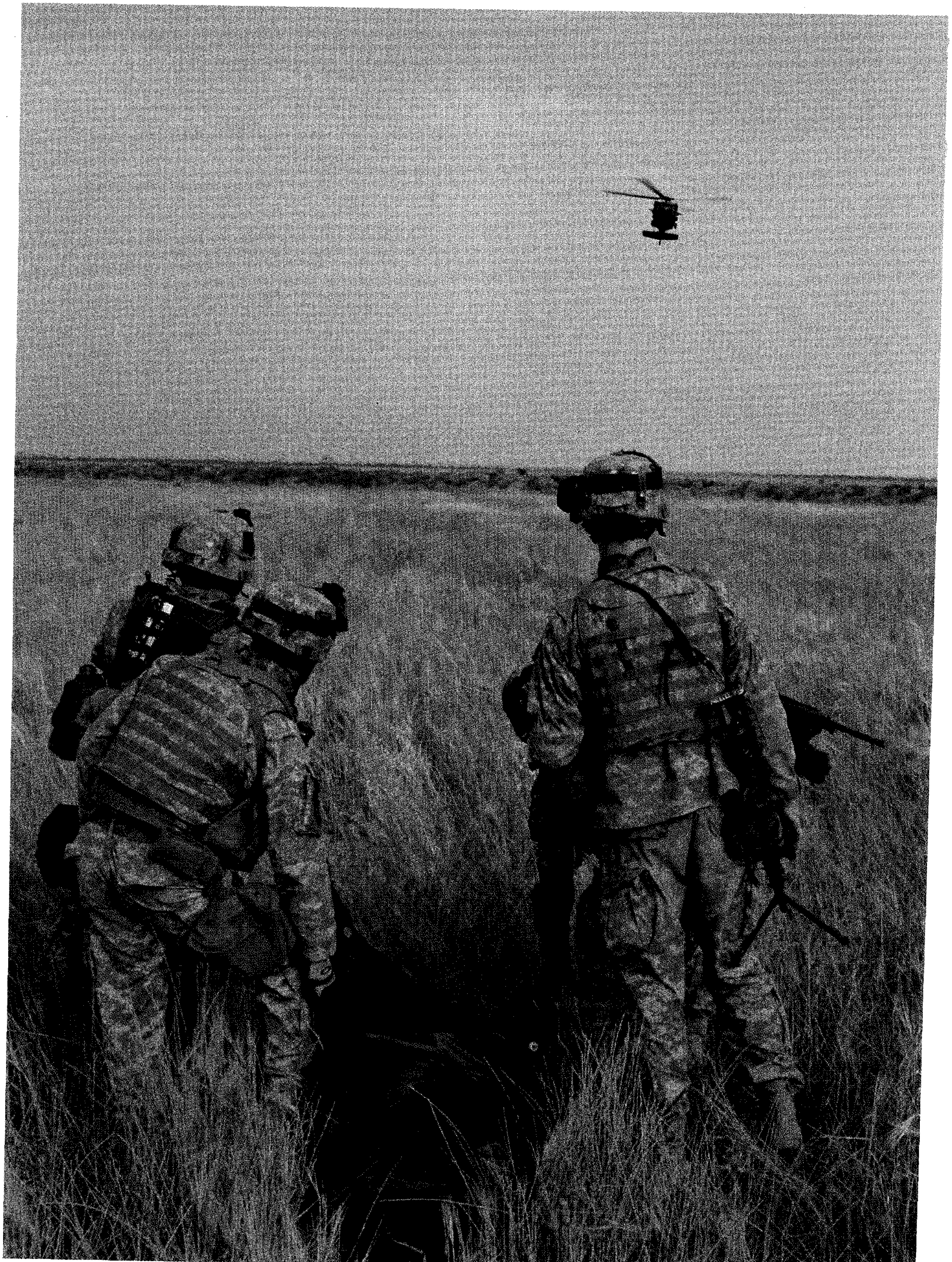
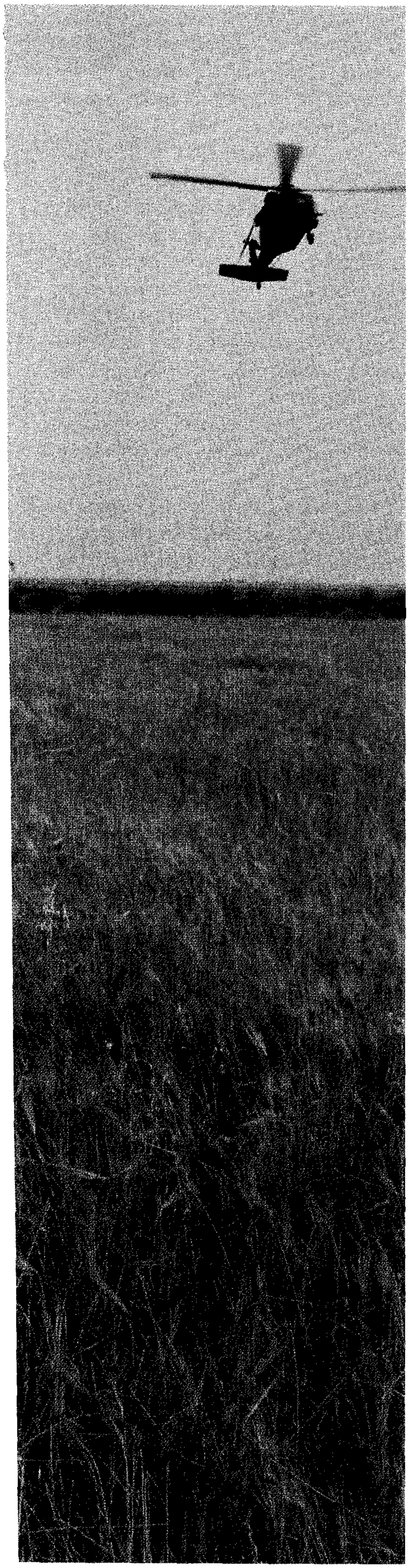


Soldiers engaged in Operation Iron Triangle carry a body bag containing a dead Iraqi near Lake Tharthar, on May 9, 2006. Photogra



Specialist Teddy Wade.

A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE KILL COMPANY

Did a colonel's fiery rhetoric set the conditions for a massacre?

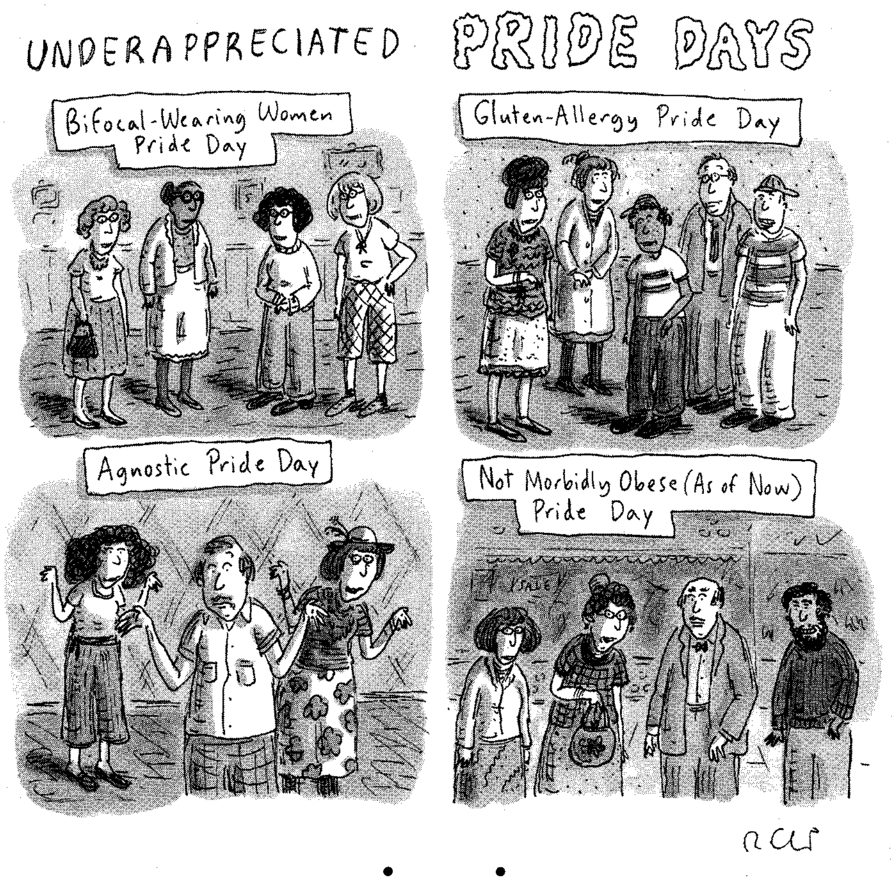
BY RAFFI KHATCHADOURIAN

Three years ago, at a hastily built command center in the Iraqi desert, near Samarra, a U.S. Army colonel knelt over a dust-caked body bag. Inside were the remains of a man who had just been killed by soldiers in the colonel's brigade, which was engaged in a vast air-assault mission called Operation Iron Triangle. The soldiers had been hunting for militants in nearby villages and crumbling Baathist-era buildings, some of which had been constructed by Saddam Hussein to serve the Al Muthanna chemical-weapons complex—a series of dirt-covered bunkers that rise from the desert like Babylonian temples. After the Gulf War, soldiers working for the United Nations and the U.S. military had sealed the bunkers with concrete. Farmers and herders began occupying the surrounding villages, and after Saddam's overthrow, in 2003, they were joined by Al Qaeda fighters, who came to the remote area to train or hide. The colonel, looking at the corpse, saw that it was that of an old man who had been shot in the chest—he was unshaved but not bearded, and a white dishdasha that clothed his body was blood-soaked. A pair of dentures, loosened from his gums, protruded from his jaw.

The colonel, Michael Dane Steele, was a man of daunting physical stature and reputation. Forty-five years old, with an angular face and cropped graying hair, Steele had grown up on a farm near Athens, Georgia. He played college football as a walk-on offensive lineman, at the University of Georgia, and eventually earned an athletic scholarship there, practicing so relentlessly that his coach named an award for perfect attendance after him. (Nobody has since managed to win it.) Within the Army, he was best known for his actions in Somalia, where, in 1993, he commanded a company of Rangers that engaged in a fifteen-hour gunfight in Mogadishu. When he landed in Iraq, in 2005, Steele was the only brigade commander there to have experienced sustained urban warfare before 9/11. He arrived with a clear sense of purpose: to subdue violence with violence, to hunt down and kill insurgents in a region of roughly ten thousand square miles within Salah ad Din province, which includes the cities of Samarra, Tikrit, and Bayji. Steele had memorized the faces of dozens of high-value targets in the region—Al Qaeda operatives and other militants—and he inspected the bodies of people his soldiers killed, looking for tattoos and other identifying marks. He personified the motto that his brigade, numbering nearly four thousand men, had adopted during the war: "We give the enemy the maximum opportunity to give his life for his country."

Steele asked another officer to photograph the corpse for intelligence purposes. A tag attached to the body bag indicated that the man's name was Jasim Hassan Komar-Abdullah, and that he was seventy years old. Steele walked away. About an hour later, three more body bags arrived by helicopter. These contained the bodies of Akhmed Farhim Hamid al-Jemi—a thin, bearded man wearing a green dishdasha—and two boys, whose tags indicated that they were under sixteen years old. None of them were known militants, either. Their remains had been disfigured by bullet wounds, and engineering tape had been loosely wrapped around their eyes, to blindfold them; around their wrists were severed black plastic zip ties—used by American soldiers to handcuff detainees.

Helicopters were landing nearby, and wind kicked up by their blades caused the unzipped body bags to flap wildly. Using a pocketknife, Steele removed the tape from the face of a corpse, so that it could be properly photographed. A few soldiers, seeing the bodies, sensed that something had gone wrong. Steele's in-


UNDERAPPRECIATED PRIDE DAYS
Bifocal-Wearing Women Pride Day
Gluten-Allergy Pride Day
Agnostic Pride Day
Not Morbidly Obese (As of Now) Pride Day
SALE

telligence officer asked, "Why would we shoot somebody, and then put a blindfold on them?" The brigade had been conducting the operation with members of the Iraqi Army, and the officer wondered if there was a ritual significance to the blindfolds. Steele thought for a moment, and said, "They must have had the blindfolds on when they got shot."

By the end of the day, it had become apparent that members of Steele's brigade had fatally shot eight Iraqi men, all of them apparently unarmed, and that they might have killed more had some soldiers not disobeyed a platoon leader's orders to gun down farmers digging in a field and men gathered near a gas station. Like the 2005 massacre at Haditha—when, in a near-spontaneous response to the death of an American soldier, marines killed twenty-four Iraqi civilians—the killings that occurred during Operation Iron Triangle suggested a grave problem within the chain of command. Determining what went wrong has proved exceedingly difficult; the case is still being debated in review boards and appellate courts, and truth has become obscured by rumor and apocrypha. A number of soldiers, among them General Peter Chiarelli, the Army's Vice-Chief of Staff, believe that Steele set the conditions for a massacre by cultivating reckless aggressiveness in his soldiers, and by interpreting the rules of engagement in a way that made the killing of noncombatants likely. Shortly after the operation was completed, Chiarelli issued Steele a severe reprimand, effectively ending his career.

Steele has since entered Army folklore as a cautionary figure—a man who travelled to a murderous place believing, as Conrad's Mr. Kurtz did, that with the "simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded," but ultimately concluding it necessary to "exterminate all the brutes." Thomas Ricks, in his recent book on Iraq, "The Gamble," portrays Steele as a soldier whose actions "directly led to atrocities." At the Army's Command and General Staff College, Steele has been compared to William Calley, the lieutenant who, during the Vietnam War, led the massacre of villagers in My Lai. Yet Steele is not a convicted war criminal, as Calley was, and at least seven retired or active-duty generals who have worked closely with him, or are familiar with his leadership in Iraq, believe that he is an exemplary, misunderstood military leader. A senior officer who served under him told me, "He's the soldier you keep behind the panel—the one that reads, 'Break glass in case of war.'" Major General Michael Oates, who, as the 101st Airborne Division's deputy commander, was one of Steele's immediate supervisors in 2006, wrote to me from Iraq to say that Steele was "one of the very best combat commanders I have seen in three tours over here." Even as top leaders in the Army reprimanded Steele, his immediate superiors praised him for running the best brigade in his division, and the military's Central Command issued his unit an award for combatting terrorism.

Operation Iron Triangle began on May 9, 2006, and lasted for three days, but it emerged from a way of thinking and a set of tactics that were developed more than a year earlier, when Steele first assumed leadership of his brigade. The debate over Steele's leadership touches upon larger questions about the ethics of modern warfare: about the distinction between killing and murder on the battlefield; about the culpability of officers when their soldiers do wrong; about the kind of force that is necessary to fight an insurgency. As General Oates told me, "The story of Colonel Steele and Operation Iron Triangle is about a fundamental difference of opinion about how to prosecute the war in Iraq."

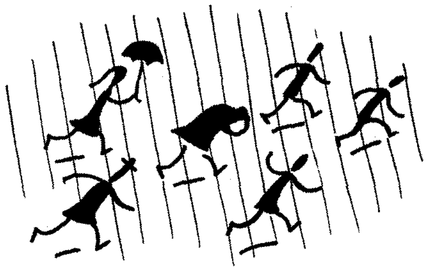
Fort Campbell, an Army base on the border between Kentucky and Tennessee, is home to the 101st Airborne Division, which fought on the beaches at Normandy and in the Battle of the Bulge. The 101st includes the only air-assault unit to have fought in the Second World War, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and Operation Desert Storm; the unit's members are known as Rakkasans. (The word, which loosely translates as "falling-down umbrella men," was used by Japanese civilians to describe paratroopers.) William Westmoreland and David Petraeus once commanded Rakkasans, and since the late nineteen-seventies, when the Army began encouraging a sense of regimental identity among its soldiers, the Rakkasans have emphasized aggressiveness and individual initiative. In part, the unit's ethos emerged from the chaos that accompanies jumping from airplanes, as its soldiers used to do, and descending on ropes from helicopters, as they do now.

In 2004, Steele arrived at Fort Campbell to lead the Rakkasans, and he was on his way to becoming a general officer. Promoted rapidly, he had become known for his emphasis on intense preparation and for his willingness to go into the field with his men. Retired Colonel Danny McKnight, who was Steele's commanding officer in the nineties, when Steele was a Ranger captain, told me, "He took his company to Thailand for training there, and I went over to visit him, and it was tough, rigorous, hot, ugly training, in terms of conditions." In 1993, McKnight, impressed by Steele and his subordinates, assigned the company to a task force assembled to capture Mohammad Farah Aidid, Somalia's most powerful warlord. The deployment came to define Steele's reputation, largely because of "Black Hawk Down," Mark Bowden's account of the tour's worst day, when American helicopters were shot down over Mogadishu. Soldiers who had served in Somalia later recalled that Steele could be impolitic, and often used bravado-laced language borrowed from football—some Rangers called him Coach. But he also helped guide many soldiers to safety, including one whose shin had been pulverized. Steele earned a Bronze Star for valor during the operation.

Eighteen soldiers died during the Black Hawk Down incident, and Steele took the deaths so hard that he rarely spoke about the deployment. Retired Lieutenant General William G. Boykin, the mission's tactical-operations commander, told me, "Somalia left Mike Steele with a determination that he would never go into combat with soldiers that he was responsible for without making sure that they were fully prepared. I think he thought that it was problematic that some of the young soldiers were not expecting the impact of trauma, not prepared emotionally for the impact of seeing dead bodies."

At Fort Campbell, Steele added to the standard Army training a program that he called "Psychological Inoculation of Combat." Believing that soldiers should not witness severe injury and death for the first time in battle, he arranged for officers to visit a morgue, and ordered medics in the unit to ride in ambulances. Though he organized lectures with a military expert to help the men overcome the stress of killing, he was reluctant to share his own war stories. One of Steele's senior officers told me, "I asked him one day, 'Sir, it would be a really good idea if you would give a professional-development lecture to all the officers on Somalia.' And he looked at me kind of funny, and he said, 'Why would I want to do that?' And I said, 'Well, I think that there are a lot of good lessons that people could learn from your experiences.' And he said, 'If people would read my command philosophy and my training guidance, they'll know the lessons that I learned. But I have no desire to talk publicly about one of the worst days of my life, and the deaths of eighteen people who were good friends of mine.'"

Even within a unit as tough as the Rakkasans, soldiers noticed that Steele had intensified and refocussed their training. "We were *not* doing Arab cultural awareness," the senior officer recalled. "We were not doing Arabic-with-Iraqi-dialect language training." Instead, Steele instituted a harsh regimen of physical conditioning—he led the brigade on eight-mile runs—and incessant practicing at the rifle range. By the time the unit reached Iraq, the vast majority of his soldiers had become expert marksmen. Steele pushed his senior officers to seek out special equipment—such as M14 rifles, which are more often used by Special Forces—and kept a wish list in his pocket, in case a general officer asked him, "How can I help you?" The standard Army pistol is a 9-mm., which often only wounds an adversary. Steele wanted his men to carry more deadly .45s; he tried unsuccessfully to obtain some through official Army channels, but eventually borrowed others from Glock, the gun manufacturer. (Later, in Iraq, the Army ordered Steele to return the Glocks, and he did.)



Steele designed his training regimen to counter a trend within the Army which he believed was deeply misguided. After the Cold War, many deployments, such as those in the Balkans, were peacekeeping operations, and Steele—who had served in Bosnia—felt that these missions had placed excessive nonmilitary burdens on soldiers. As a result, he told his senior officers, infantrymen entered combat without honed fighting abilities. Steele wanted to make his men skilled at killing, but also capable of restraint. He called his soldiers "sheepdogs"—creatures bred to protect the defenseless. General Oates told me that Steele's single-minded emphasis on core fighting skills put him in conflict with other officers "who do not share his sense of urgency for realistic combat training." Before deploying to Iraq, Steele announced that Rakkasans would not be firing warning shots: they would shoot to disable or kill. The decision was unorthodox for the American military, and some officers objected to the policy, but Steele argued that police never fired warning shots, because it was too risky, especially in urban settings.

The brigade became known for its cultivated pugnacity. The Rakkasans engaged in fighting tournaments, designed by Steele. After one such event—a platoon-on-platoon brawl—dozens of soldiers sustained injuries requiring medical attention, but many emerged feeling deep kinship with their regiment. The senior officer recalled going to the hospital after a late-night tournament. "I had broken two bones in my hand," he told me. "I think there were six officers that got hurt. But it was fun. It wasn't like 'Oh, I'm hurt.' It was like 'Oh, I broke two fingers hitting a major in the back of the head!' That was a good thing. So word got out across the division: 'Oh my God, they're nuts!' But there was always a point to being physical in that way—it was about teaching soldiers what you do as a soldier. Nobody likes to talk about it, but if you are in an infantry brigade that's what you do."

Before the Rakkasans left for Iraq, on September 18, 2005, Steele readied the brigade with speeches reinforcing his core principles: be precise; be lethal; protect yourself. He promised trophy knives for the killing of insurgents or for exemplary service. In one speech, Steele spoke in a darkened auditorium. "The Rakkasans are going into the worst spot in Iraq," he said, pacing. "That's not something that you droop your head down [and] say, 'Woe is me.' That's something that you stick your chest out, and you say, 'You're damn right we're going there,' because where we're going they couldn't send a bunch of Girl Scouts and left-handed midgets." The crowd laughed, and Steele, echoing the "blood and guts" rhetoric of General George S. Patton, continued, "The guy that is going to win on the far end is the one who gets violent the fastest."

Steele told his men that he wanted "to whip somebody's ass" when he heard soldiers talk about taking known enemy fighters as prisoners. "They say, 'Well, you know, they're shooting at you. What we need to do is, we need to go over and we need to kick their feet out from under them, and flex-cuff them, and bring them back and put them in a room, and give them some water because they're probably dehydrated and not thinking well—give them some food because they have not eaten well, put our arm around them, give them an open-mouth kiss, tell 'em we love 'em.'" Some soldiers laughed again. "After we've befriended them, then they're gonna tell us all this intelligence. Man, that is bullshit." He continued, "If you go out and somebody presents a lethal threat to you, and you shoot him, do not feel bad and think that you should have brought him back, because I didn't want to talk to him." Steele told his men to think of themselves as apex predators ("If you mess with me, I will eat you"), but he also insisted that they act lawfully. "We are not gonna be driving around Iraq raping, burning, pillaging, being undisciplined," he said. "That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about the moment of truth, when you're about to kill the other son of a bitch. I do not want you to choke."

A folded American flag was on a lectern at the back of the stage. Picking it up, he explained that the flag had been recovered from Building No. 7 at the World Trade Center. Steele vowed to take the flag with him to Iraq. "Men, it is time to go hunting," he concluded. "You're the hunter. You're the predator. You're looking for the prey. Rakkasans!"

THE HERBIVORES

At the time of Steele's deployment, the 101st Airborne's base of operations in Iraq was in Tikrit, and its offices were divided into two wings: one was devoted to operational matters, such as raids to kill or capture insurgents; the other was focussed on civil and legal affairs. Someone had posted a sign reading "Carnivores" over the entrance to the operations wing, and a sign reading "Herbivores" over the other entrance. Though intended as satire, the signs reflected a deep division. Military operations aimed at crushing Iraqi resistance were poorly coördinated with civic efforts aimed at encouraging democracy and reconstruction. In 2005, the insurgency gathered force, and bombings and civilian deaths increased dramatically, making it clear that America's strategy was failing. It was not until the surge of 2007 that the work of the Carnivores and the Herbivores was synthesized, under the command of General David Petraeus, into a strategic framework that made protecting the Iraqi population its focus.

The year before the surge, however, some Herbivores had attempted to recalibrate America's Iraq strategy. At the start of 2006, General Chiarelli took command of the Army's day-to-day operations in Iraq, and he was certain that no amount of killing or capturing could exhaust the ranks of unemployed and angry Iraqis willing to join the insurgency. Chiarelli, who taught political science at West Point and has advanced degrees in public administration and national security, experienced sustained combat for the first time in 2004, in Iraq, as the head of the First Cavalry Division. That year, Chiarelli's men participated in a campaign to subdue Baghdad, fighting militias controlled by Moqtada al-Sadr, the radical Shiite cleric. Chiarelli became convinced that the way to win Baghdad was through civilian outreach, not skirmishes. When Chiarelli's men compared maps of insurgent activity with those showing access to electricity and drinkable water, they found a direct correlation between terrorist incidents and a lack of services. Chiarelli became an evangelical proponent of improving life for the "have-nots." While some of his soldiers engaged in intense urban battles, others, blocks away, protected contractors rebuilding infrastructure. Some people called him Mr. Wastewater Treatment.

In 2006, in his new job, Chiarelli had considerable leverage to impose his vision throughout the country. Three years into the war, the number of American soldiers dying each day showed no signs of diminishing, and Al Qaeda, led in Iraq by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, was becoming more active. A number of Army commanders believed that it was the wrong time to shift the focus away from killing, but Chiarelli argued that the Carnivore approach was doing more harm than good. In his view, the Army had fallen for a false dichotomy—security versus reconstruction—when, by rebuilding cities, it could achieve both. "If you're saying you've got to get an area secure before you do any reconstruction, you'll never get any reconstruction done," he told a group of officers, and he pushed to spend millions of dollars on projects that increased Iraqi employment. Chiarelli instructed soldiers to capture rather than kill militants whenever possible. He urged soldiers to use a "soft knock" approach when entering houses, so that "people feel good about their security." Before Chiarelli arrived, American soldiers had been killing, on average, one Iraqi a day, at checkpoints or roadblocks, or on highways; Chiarelli demanded investigations of such incidents, and their frequency soon dropped by eighty-five per cent. Whenever civilians were killed, Chiarelli insisted that their families be compensated. He wanted Iraqis to regard the Army as a just institution that was serving their interests.

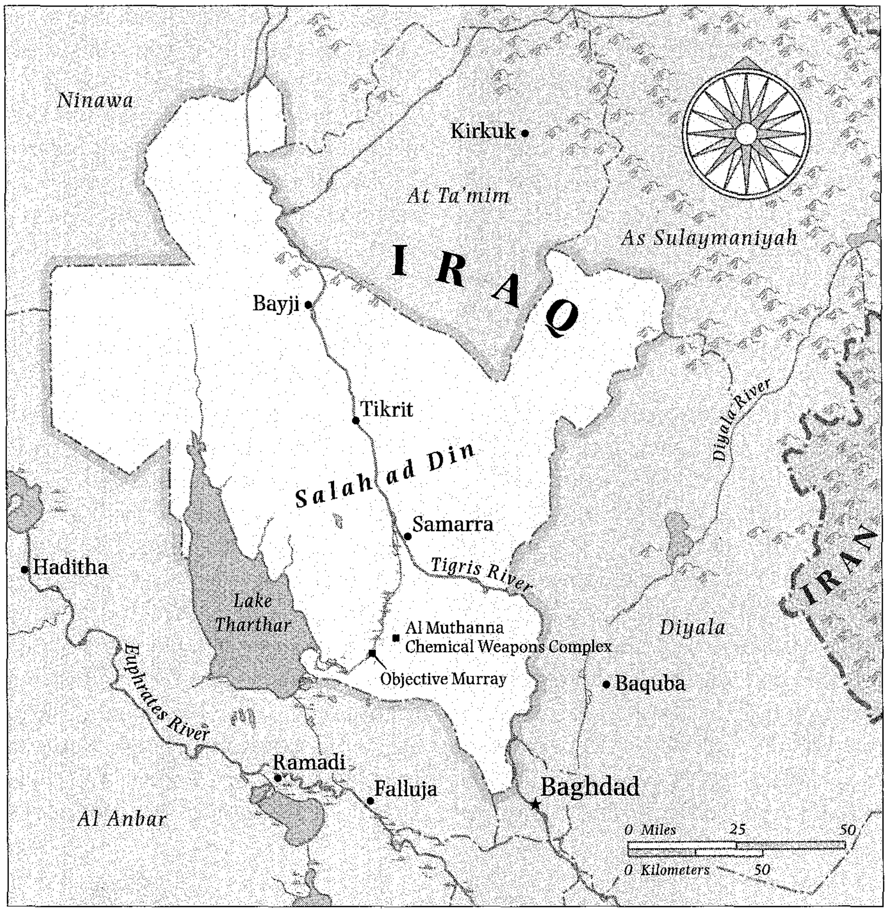
Many of Chiarelli's ideas were anathema to Steele, who has master's degrees in administration and strategic studies, and who wanted the Army to demonstrate, above all, that it had a monopoly on power in Iraq. His men razed houses that had been harboring insurgents, and he limited reconstruction projects. Steele's former deputy commander, Colonel Craig Collier, told me, "Although the general belief is that the more money into the mix the better, we didn't find that that was the case. Samarra was a perfect example. You paid a guy to pave a road, and, if someone else knew, they would go threaten him. They may blow up his equipment. After a while, you begin to wonder: Who is really doing this? Is it a rival faction? Is it the insurgency? I don't know. All I know is that money didn't decrease the violence—it increased it." Disregarding Chiarelli's explicit guidance, Steele and his staff dramatically cut spending on local development projects that didn't directly relate to security.

The relationship between Chiarelli and Steele quickly devolved into a feud. (Both men declined to talk about the deployment for this article.) When Chiarelli brought an Iraqi police commander to Salah ad Din province, Steele wouldn't sit in the same car with the commander. On one occasion, Steele's brigade observed two insurgents firing mortars. They tracked the militants to a hut, and attacked it from the air, killing the men and a pregnant woman who was inside. Chiarelli's staff insisted that Steele's soldiers find and compensate the woman's family; Steele's brigade staff refused, and epithets were exchanged.

In February, 2006, after insurgents blew up the al-Askari Mosque, in Samarra, triggering sectarian violence throughout Iraq, Chiarelli came to Samarra and was briefed by Steele's staff. Chiarelli demanded to know how much the brigade was spending on reconstruction and, midway through the meeting, stormed out, saying that Steele had not invested heavily enough in infrastructure. Around this time, Steele's brigade came to believe that they were being scrutinized by the Army's Criminal Investigation Command. If a soldier returned to base with a detainee who had been bruised during a struggle to apprehend him, a formal investigation was launched, even if the man did not complain of being abused. "They were out for our heads," one soldier told me. "They were trying to limit our aggressiveness."

THE KILL BOARD

Long before Steele's brigade assumed command of Salah ad Din province, it was evident that Samarra and its environs would be extremely hard to control. An Army commander, who had attempted to subdue the city in 2003, wrote in a memoir, "Nowhere did the battle seem more hopeless than in Samarra. The city itself reminded me of something you might have found in Germany or England in World War II—a battered metropolitan area that had survived multiple bombings." When one of Steele's infantry battalions arrived, Samarra had no functioning government. Despite more than fifty million dollars' worth of American investment, the city had sporadic electricity, no sewage system, and a central water plant working at twenty-per-cent capacity. A street war raged between two clans, one of them possibly linked to Al Qaeda, and a criminal gang operated an extortion ring that frequently threatened contract workers.



Small islands at the edge of Lake Tharthar served as ideal Al Qaeda hideouts.

JEFFREY WARD

In some respects, the desert extending from Samarra toward Falluja, through the heart of the Sunni Triangle, was more dangerous than the city. It contained isolated settlements where insurgent leaders who had been pushed out of urban areas were in hiding. Steele's most daring unit, Charlie Company, patrolled the area. The unit had about a hundred and forty men; its commanding officer, Captain Daniel Hart, had been First Captain at West Point. He was soft-spoken, religious, and bookish, but also an extremely assertive soldier. "When it came to civilians, anybody that may or may not be posing a threat, he really didn't screw around," a soldier said. During one patrol, an improvised explosive device, or I.E.D., detonated near several company members; Hart wanted to find the attackers, who appeared to have taken cover nearby. The soldier recalled, "There was a market with various shops, and he sat everybody down, and he just said, 'We don't want any more trouble from this area. We do not want to take a bulldozer and blow your shops over, but we will if we have to.'"

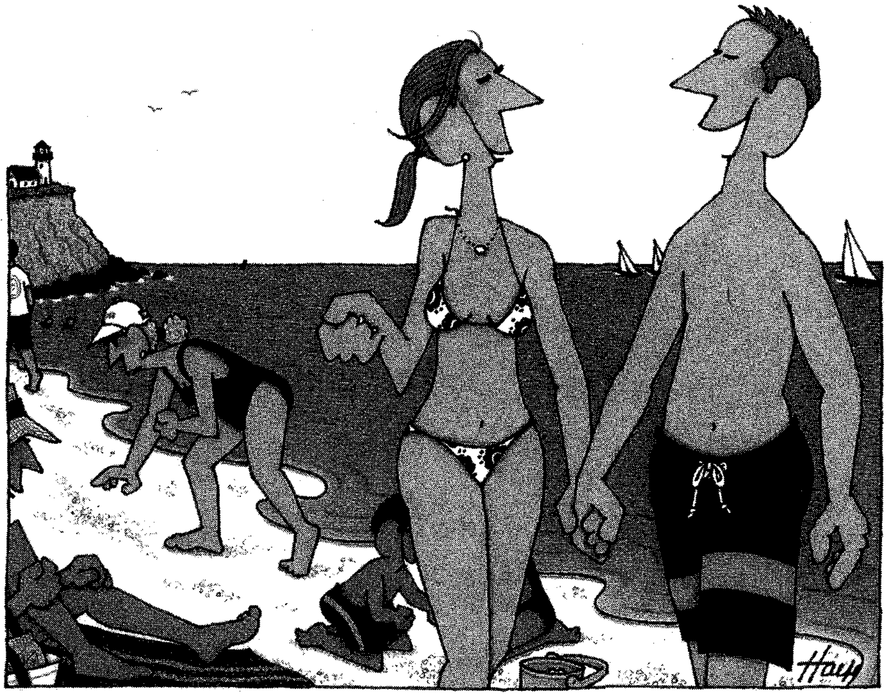
Charlie Company's ranking noncommissioned officer, First Sergeant Eric Geressy, grew up on Staten Island. He had served in the Army for seventeen years, and was known for his black humor and sarcasm—"your typical grumpy first sergeant," another soldier told me. Geressy was unapologetic about wanting to kill insurgents, and about pushing his men hard to do so. He later told a general with the 101st Airborne that, if military law allowed for killing, but circumstances allowed for capture, he believed that his commanders expected him to shoot. This attitude echoed one of Steele's oft-repeated command priorities: "Anytime you fight, you always kill the other son of a bitch—always." In 2007, Geressy earned a Silver Star, for leading his unit in a six-and-half-hour battle in Baghdad "while instilling confidence in his men, directing key weapons systems on enemy positions, and evacuating a wounded soldier out of harm's way." (Steele, who participated in the ceremony, said he hoped that his son, a West Point cadet, would one day "walk shoulder by shoulder into combat with a man like Eric Geressy.")

After a few months in Samarra, Charlie Company became known to some soldiers as the Kill Company. By midsummer, 2006, the infantry battalion had reported sixty-eight kills; roughly half of them had been committed by Hart's men. Hart's commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Nathaniel Johnson, told me that the high rate was a reflection of the violence of the region that Charlie Company had to control. "Look at the battle space they had," he said. Charlie Company units patrolled relentlessly, sometimes for weeks at a time, and suffered a large spike in attacks soon after they arrived in Samarra. Even so, some of the company's own soldiers were disturbed by the emphasis on killing. A Charlie Company staff sergeant told military investigators, "When we were coming over here, people would say, 'I can't wait to kill one of those Beebs' "—Army slang for Iraqis. "I would say, 'You don't want that, because it would be something you would have to live with for the rest of your life.' " Later, the staff sergeant told me that many of his fellow-soldiers hated Iraqis: "I think they wanted to fight, but we really never had *fight* fights, and I guess a lot of guys got frustrated. They wanted to do what an infantryman is supposed to do, and that is to kill."

At the company's headquarters, a dry-erase board, known as the Kill Board, listed the number of confirmed enemy kills by platoon. Geressy told me that the Kill Board was intended to help soldiers overcome guilty feelings that they might have after killing insurgents. "It does not do a lot for your soldier when the only thing he sees is how many dead Americans were killed today," he said. "That was a big part of it." Tallying deaths became a kind of game, a way to keep score. Someone jokingly started a record of how many animals the company cat had killed. For a time, the words "Let the bodies hit the floor"—a reference to a rock song popular within the Army—were on the board. To the dismay of some company members, including Hart, civilian deaths were sometimes counted, too. "It disgusted me," an officer belonging to Charlie Company told me. "Everyone understands that if you are going after a legitimate target there may be collateral damage, and no one in my platoon had anything but complete remorse when a noncombatant was killed." He went on, "*Any* kill would wind up on the Kill Board, and when you do that you aren't putting enough emphasis on the remorse that makes you go above and beyond to insure that civilians are protected." The Kill Board was eventually erased.

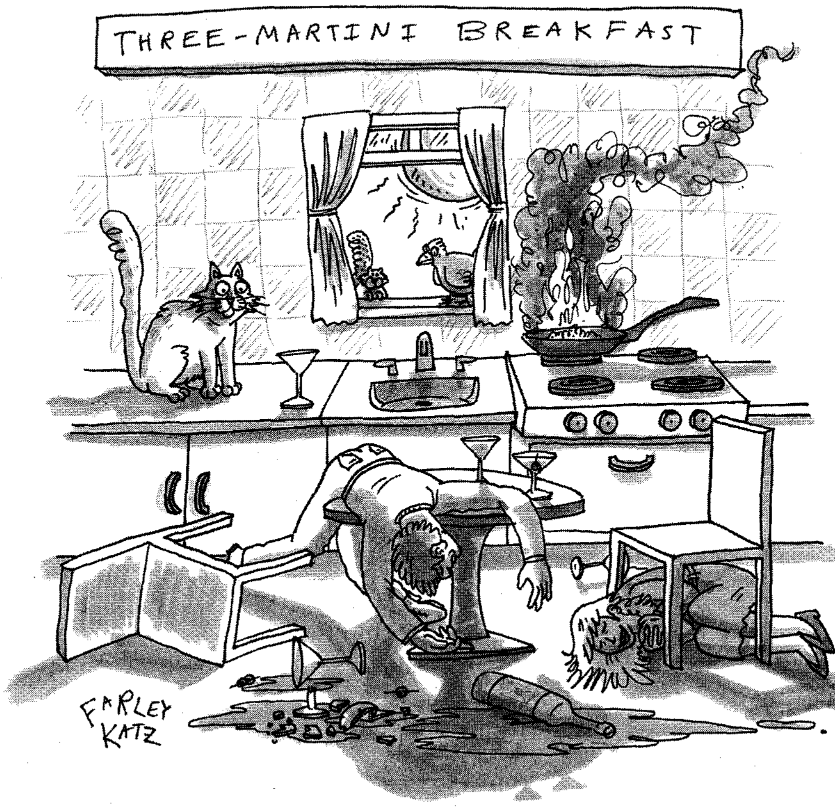
Some soldiers believed that Geressy's leadership was at times needlessly violent, and oblivious of the political realities of a counterinsurgency. A sniper who worked closely with Charlie Company told military investigators that some people in the unit had been "brainwashed throughout the deployment to kill," even in ambiguous situations, adding, "I feel that the problems are caused by the first sergeant and the commanding officer." But other soldiers—among them men who disapproved of the Kill Board—maintained that Geressy was, on balance, tough but capable. Pete Hegseth, a former Charlie Company platoon leader, told me that even if Geressy "did cross the line at certain times," he was "an American hero and a trained warrior." Not long after arriving in Samarra, for instance, Geressy, along with two other soldiers, risked his life to save eight Iraqis from a vehicle that was on fire. Hegseth said of Geressy, "I think he had a lot of frustration with what an insurgency is—that we are fighting a bunch of cowards who won't fight us man to man, who hide amongst women and children, who don't wear uniforms."

Early in the deployment, members of the company identified a pair of enemy snipers; they killed one and detained another. A soldier who was there told me that Geressy announced a plan to parade the dead sniper's body among locals. "He wanted to go to the market and show people what happens when you mess with us," the soldier recalled. When a platoon leader protested, Geressy re-



"You are my blue beach glass."

sponded, "You are goddam half-retarded." In the end, the soldier said, Geressy did not parade the body. (Geressy denies that the discussion even took place.) A member of the brigade staff told me, "Did he want to kill bad guys? Absolutely. He was very focussed on it. Was there false machismo going around? Absolutely."



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Hegseth told me that Charlie Company's sense of when it was appropriate to use force, and how much force it could use, was partly shaped by the guidance that the Rakkasans had received at Fort Campbell. When the unit first arrived in Iraq, he said, its soldiers struggled to find the right balance between lethality and restraint. Members of the unit were initially instructed to enter a house ready to fire their weapons. "That's what we trained on," Hegseth told me. But the policy was soon changed. "It came to me in my bed one night that Sergeant So-and-So is going to come into one of those houses hot and start shooting people, not because he is a bad person but because that is what he has been told to do." Before a raid one day, he recalled, "I went to Captain Hart and I said, 'Sir, I don't feel comfortable telling my guys to go into that door hot.' And I can't quote him directly, but he said, 'What do you mean? This is an enemy target, we have intelligence that it is an Al Qaeda mortar team.' And I said, 'I understand that, sir, and I don't want to put my platoon in danger, but at the same time I am talking to other people who have been here for a while and nobody else goes in hot—nobody. And if we go in hot we are going to kill civilians.'"

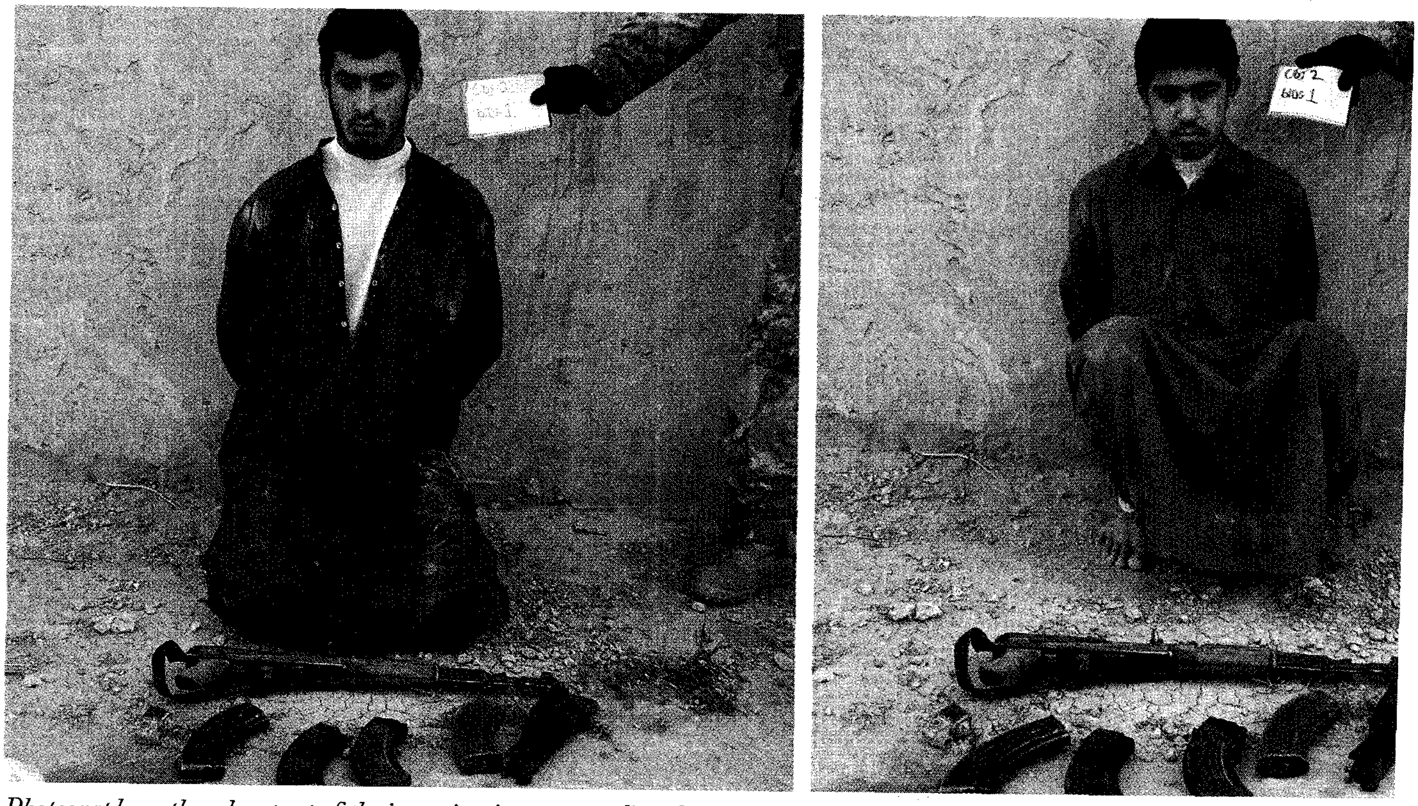
The Army's rules of engagement, or R.O.E., which govern when and how much force a soldier may use in combat, can fit on two dozen printed pages, and are classified as secret. During much of the war, they were a mess of papers. Changes were often made piecemeal, sometimes a few words at a time, by "fragmentary orders." In early 2006, fragmentary orders were dizzyingly numerous, and many commanders were unfamiliar with them all. Still, the core rules rarely changed. Generally, soldiers in Iraq are trained to use force against what are known as "conduct-based targets": people who act in a hostile manner or display hostile intent. Hostile actions are easy to identify. (If a cabdriver fires a rifle at a soldier, he instantly becomes a combatant.) Establishing hostile intent is harder. (If a cab is racing toward a soldier, is the driver's intent hostile, or is he drunk?) Whenever a soldier uses force, the rules say, his reaction must be proportional to the threat. In part because judging intent and proportionality are subjective, the Army scrutinizes every incident in which one of its weapons is discharged.

For many years, soldiers have also been permitted to kill people because of who they are, rather than what they are doing—such people are "status-based targets." During the Second World War, an American infantryman could shoot an S.S. officer who was eating lunch in a French café without violating the Law of War, so long as he did not actively surrender. The officer's uniform made it obvious that he was the enemy. In Iraq, the R.O.E. listed about two dozen "designated terrorist organizations," including Al Qaeda, and, if it can be proved that someone is a member of one of these groups, that person can legally be killed. For a time, the R.O.E. designated as a status-based target any armed man wearing the uniform of the Mahdi Army—the militia led by Moqtada al-Sadr. (After Sadr called a truce, in 2004, the militia was provisionally taken off the list.) But most insurgent groups in Iraq don't wear uniforms, so their members must be "positively identified" by informants or other forms of intelligence before they can legally be killed. An insurgent is positively identified if there is "reasonable certainty" that he belongs to a declared hostile group.

An air strike is a classic example of a status-based operation. On the ground, such targeting is most often used by snipers and Special Forces—soldiers of maturity and skill, who have access to high levels of intelligence. But Steele believed that the infantrymen in his brigade could also make use of it. "We were reading the R.O.E. and it says that, if you are a member of one of these groups, then you are a lawful armed combatant," a former member of the brigade staff told me. "We were like, Why aren't we getting rid of these guys when we see them, like we would kill an Iraqi soldier in the first part of the war?"

A few weeks before Operation Iron

Triangle, Steele and his staff briefed the battalion commanders on status-based targeting, instructing them that their men could kill someone if two credible informants confirmed that the person belonged to one of the listed terrorist groups. Several battalion commanders expressed concern that status-based targeting might result in the killing of innocents, and three of them decided not to tell their company commanders about the policy. The commander of Steele’s battalion in Samarra, however, did discuss status-based targeting with his company commanders, and Captain Hart embraced the idea.



Photographs gathered as part of the investigation surrounding Operation Iron Triangle show three detainees shortly before they wer

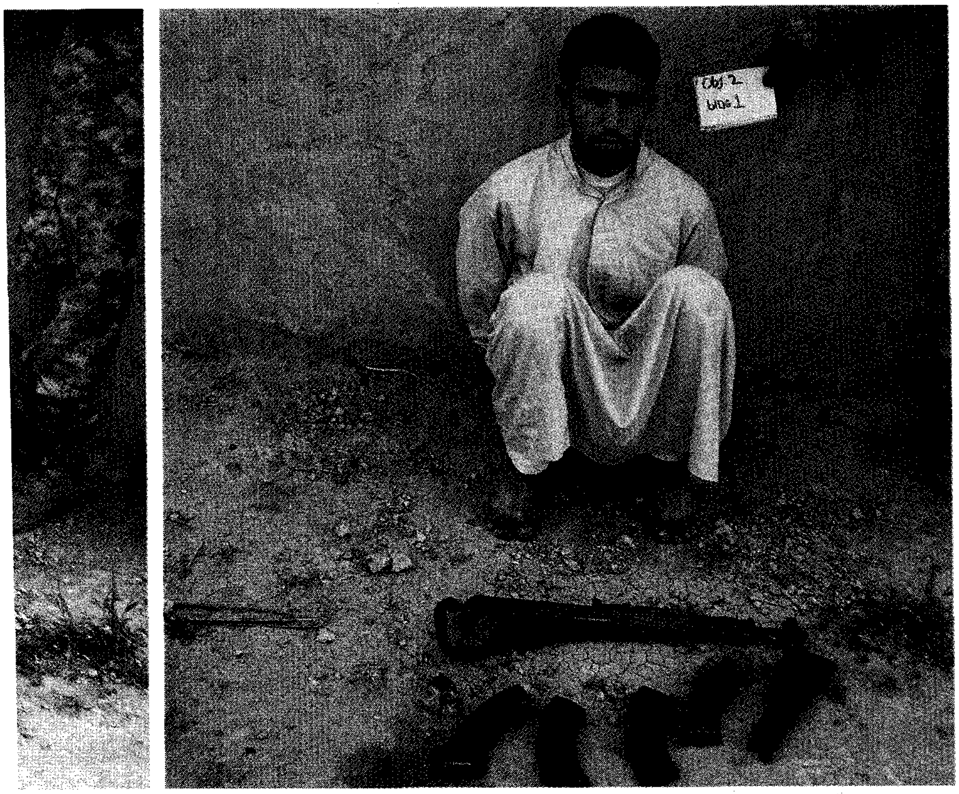
One of Hart’s status-based operations was called by his men Operation Judgment Day. Charlie Company soldiers had conducted weeks of surveillance on targets in the Samarra region who appeared to be operating unambiguously as insurgents. During the operation, three soldiers entered a grocery store, and confronted a target who had been positively identified by Hart moments earlier. As the soldiers walked in, the target was attempting to make a call on his cell phone; in Iraq, I.E.D.s were sometimes set off by cell phones. The soldiers executed the target. At a different location, soldiers stormed a target’s house, accidentally killing a young girl while they gunned the man down in his kitchen. In another instance, the operation pushed to the limit the distinction between target and detainee. “We raided a house, and I had this guy up against a wall, with my weapon at the back of his head,” a Charlie Company infantryman recalled. “And my platoon leader comes over the radio and says, ‘If it is this guy, shoot him.’” (It wasn’t.)

Colonel Steele sometimes told his officers, “We will never cross the line, but we might get chalk all over our feet,” and maneuvers such as Operation Judgment Day seemed to exemplify the sentiment. “It sparked a pretty sizable philosophical debate within our office,” an officer in the battalion’s staff told me. “The crux of the debate we had was: Is Charlie Company following the letter of the law, or are they running as far as they can with it to kill as many bad people as possible?” Ultimately, the battalion’s leadership gave its blessing to operations such as Judgment Day, because they appeared to reduce violence. “We had one insurgent go to the city-council president looking for amnesty,” the officer recalled. “He was like, ‘I am on this list and I don’t want to die, and I am willing to work with you.’”

It is fair to assume that Steele was unaware of the debates that lower-level soldiers had about Charlie Company’s leadership; and despite numerous investigations the Army had never judged any of Charlie Company’s operations to be criminal. Over all, the unit appeared to operate as Steele wanted it to, and he made use of it for a number of large missions. In March, 2006, after an aerial strike on some huts near a remote wadi, Charlie Company and other Rakkasans flew in to the settlement. The soldiers discovered maps, weapons, cash, and Al Qaeda expense accounts. (One senior militant had spent sixteen million dollars in a month.) The soldiers also found several Nintendo Game Boys and one-terabyte hard drives containing valuable intelligence, such as a detailed chart of Al Qaeda’s main leadership in Iraq. The military learned that Zarqawi had divided his organization into nine groups, of about forty-five men each, and that he drew on a support network extending into eleven nearby countries. The hard drives contained the names of the Al Qaeda fighters in charge of each Iraqi region. Afterward, General George Casey, the top military official in Iraq at the time, called Steele to congratulate him. He said that the Rakkasans had seized the largest cache of information in the war to date.

CHASING ZARQAWI

Steele was so haunted by Zarqawi that he dreamed about him. A member of the brigade's command staff told me that it would be an understatement to say that Steele was obsessed by the idea of killing Al Qaeda's leading operative. In March, 2006, Steele conducted Operation Swarmer, the largest air-assault mission in Iraq since the American invasion; intelligence later suggested that the Rakkasans narrowly missed finding Zarqawi, who apparently had left the vicinity just before the mission began.



illed, on May 9, 2006. Photographs by Sergeant Leonel Lemus.

That spring, Steele planned Operation Iron Triangle, which grew out of months of surveillance in the area near the Al Muthanna chemical-weapons complex. The bevelled, windowless cruciform bunkers of Al Muthanna loom over the flat, dun-colored earth. Twenty miles to the west is a reservoir, Lake Tharthar. Canals and tributaries cleave away from the lake's eastern embankments like rivulets coursing through dirt, creating easy-to-defend, striplike islands, some of them fringed with marshland. Steele's intelligence team, along with members of the Defense Intelligence Agency and Task Force 145—a Special Forces unit attempting to hunt down senior Al Qaeda fighters—had gathered a wealth of information about insurgents operating in the area. (Members of the task force had killed at least two dozen people there.) Numerous informants attested that the complex had become an Al Qaeda hideout, and that fighters—some of them foreigners—often cleared civilians from the area while they trained, or made improvised explosive devices. In late 2005, according to one raw-intelligence report, most of Al Qaeda's leadership in Iraq had gathered near the complex for a meeting. Similar reports stated that insurgents had attempted to develop crude chemical weapons there, and that a militant who engaged in beheadings, and was known as a "prince in the city of Falluja," had held meetings in a "garage or parking area behind a gas station" near the complex. In February, 2006, an informant told the military that the "prince" was forming a unit of suicide bombers drawn from male volunteers between the ages of thirteen and fifteen.

On May 1st, a raw-intelligence report wired to Steele's headquarters summarized news from an Iraqi in Baghdad who claimed to know someone working with insurgents near Al Muthanna. The informant, who was deemed to be "fairly reliable" by the Army, stated that on April 30th Zarqawi, wearing a "high-quality false beard," had driven to an area near the complex, in an armored blue Mercedes without license plates. Zarqawi had with him a laptop computer containing instructional material on shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles. Training was being conducted among reeds in a marsh.

Steele arranged to have the Baghdad informant flown by helicopter over the Al Muthanna complex and the surrounding area. From the air, the informant, sitting alongside members of the brigade's senior staff, identified isolated dwellings being used by foreign fighters. An officer who was in the helicopter later told me, "I remember the informant said, 'There could be nobody there, but if you hit at the right time, and training was going on, this is what you could find.' " The helicopter passed over the southern tip of an island, three miles long and half a mile wide, just west of the complex. Near a bank along a canal, the men in the aircraft could see two lone mud huts. The informant waved his hand over them, in a gesture that appeared to include the whole island. "All Zarqawi's men," he said.

The huts were to be targeted as part of Operation Iron Triangle, which was set to begin in just over twenty-four hours, and members of Steele's command worked into the night to assemble what the Army calls a Kinetic Strike Request—in this case, a formal proposal to bombard the structures before any soldiers touched down. The request called for the use of guided rockets and Hellfire missiles, and was sent up the chain of command, eventually reaching Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who concluded that Major General Thomas Turner, the commander of the 101st Airborne, should make the final decision. Turner, concerned that the missiles might disperse deadly chemicals, decided against the strikes. So Steele and his staff narrowed the request to the two mud huts, calling the target Objective Murray. Not only had the informant identified the spot; Steele's men had previously listened to Al Qaeda fighters communicating from the huts by satellite phone. Other intelligence suggested that jihadi scouts on motorcycles patrolled the area.

Hours before the operation was scheduled to begin, Turner once again declined the air strikes, and Steele suddenly faced the possibility of sending his men on the most treacherous mission of their deployment without air cover—a situation as potentially lethal as the day that his company had been pinned down in Mogadishu. "It was like, 'Fuck you, guys, you're on your own,'" one Rakkasan said of Turner's decision.

In most status-based operations, soldiers must identify combatants by name, and then prove, with reasonable certainty, that they are members of a terrorist organization before they can be killed. The intelligence that Steele had acquired about the mud huts made him feel certain that anyone there was a member of Al Qaeda, but he was unable to identify them individually. But, based on the way that Turner had denied the air strikes, Steele inferred that he could declare everyone at the mud huts a "hostile target." Turner had never questioned the notion that only combatants would be found at the mud huts; moreover, earlier that year, he had begun delegating authority to conduct air strikes, in certain situations, to the commander who was on the scene at the time. Steele concluded that initiating an attack on the two mud huts with his soldiers was a comparable act, and that once the Rakkasans touched down anyone they encountered "could legally be engaged or destroyed."

Before Operation Iron Triangle began, a tragic misconception arose. One of the operation's main planners later said, "The R.O.E. from the brigade commander on down was: Shoot all military-aged males on Objective Murray." But, during a meeting to coördinate the various components of the operation, two members of Charlie Company's leadership later recalled, someone said that the entire island had been declared a hostile target, even though Objective Murray constituted only the two mud huts. This became consequential when Steele's senior officers discussed the rules of engagement with their men. In the hours before the operation, at least fourteen soldiers, of varying rank, recall receiving guidance to shoot any military-aged male on the island. Some of the soldiers said that they had been given the instruction directly from Steele, who later wrote, "While I never specifically stated that every military-age male should be killed on Objective Murray, the unit's understanding fell within my intent. This didn't mean that soldiers should wantonly kill every man on the objective. It meant that individuals on the objective were combatants by status unless they made a clear and objective action to become a non-combatant (e.g., stood still with their hands raised)."

Captain Hart was among the soldiers who believed that there were numerous buildings on the island housing combatants, and that Steele and others had talked about killing all military-aged males. "I think we said it a lot," he told military investigators. As new intelligence was obtained, Hart said, he continually updated his soldiers about its effect on the rules of engagement. "All the compounds on the island belong to guys that are in Al Qaeda," he remembered telling them after the informant had been flown over the island, adding, "When you go in there, be ready to kill them."

On the evening of May 8th, Steele visited some of Hart's men as they were making final preparations for the assault. Steele's intent was to hand out trophy knives to a few soldiers; in the days leading up to Operation Iron Triangle, the members of Charlie Company had endured a gruelling series of patrols and missions, often going without sleep. When Steele arrived, the men gathered around him, and he shared a few words. At such times, Steele often reminded the Rakkasans to face danger with confidence. Before their deployment to Iraq, he had told them, "Men, when you walk out that gate, fly out that gate, drive out that gate, I expect you to look like a killer," and "Send a message: I am the dominant predator on this street, and if you mess with me I will eat you."

In the anxious hours before Operation Iron Triangle commenced, it may have been that Steele, who was more cognizant of the impending dangers than his men, feared more for his soldiers' safety than they did. As he spoke, a few soldiers did not pay much attention. Others recalled him employing the usual rhetoric—of explaining that the Rakkasans were to "kill the sons of bitches" at the objective. But Steele later described giving a more muted speech, anchored by the notion that no amount of soldierly conviction could insure everyone's safe return. "Guys, you are going to get shot coming off the helicopter," he recalled saying. "If you don't get shot, you ought to be surprised. This is the most dangerous objective that we have ever gone into."

SHOOT THAT MAN

Operation Iron Triangle began at midnight on May 9, 2006, when soldiers under the command of Lieutenant Michael Horne, a Charlie Company platoon leader, left a base outside Tikrit and headed toward Al Muthanna. Horne, who was twenty-three, had enlisted in the Army in 2004, mainly to get a college scholarship, but also because he was moved by the events of 9/11. One soldier described him as "a good old Irish boy from Massachusetts, a real go-getter, a real good kid, but a little over-eager and inexperienced." Horne had been nominated for a Bronze Star with valor for his actions during a raid to hunt down and kill one of Samarra's criminal overlords.

Horne had been to the Lake Tharthar region before. In February, he had witnessed the aftermath of an ambush by insurgents there, which left a member of the Special Forces dead. Al Muthanna, he told me, was a "nasty area." For Operation Iron Triangle, Horne was to lead several Humvees in what the military terms a ground-assault convoy, driving for hours along the primary thoroughfare from Samarra to Falluja. The Army calls the road A.S.R. Golden, but it was known to some soldiers as Anti-Iraqi Forces Highway. In late 2005, insurgent activity along the route became so intense that the brigade in charge of the province at the time cordoned it off with barbed wire and abandoned it.

Horne's mission was to sweep through a dusty region south of the chemical complex and east of the island. An Al Qaeda leader known as Abu Abdullah, who was providing medical expertise and military training to local insurgents, was said to be in the area. Abdullah, among the most-wanted men in Salah ad Din province, was allegedly responsible for ten American deaths. Status-based targeting had not been sanctioned for this part of the operation, but Horne told me that during the planning phase he could not grasp the rules of engagement. "It was very confusing, at least at the platoon level," he said. "When we left on that mission, I don't *think* I had a clear understanding of how it was supposed to happen." A number of other infantrymen in the convoy also appeared to be confused.

After travelling for five hours on the highway, Horne and his men arrived at their destination: decrepit administrative buildings that appeared to have been bombed during Saddam's regime, and a village that seemed mostly abandoned. On the façades of some houses were painted handprints—symbols of the insurgency. The soldiers searched the village and spotted a few Iraqi men digging in a field near a white truck. Horne ordered a sergeant to kill the Iraqis, a soldier who was present later told military investigators. The sergeant replied that they were beyond his rifle range; another soldier recalled, "I remember looking at Horne, and him saying, 'We're going to give the snipers a try,' and he had a big fucking smile on his face."

Two snipers, Geoffrey Kugler and Jason Stachowski, climbed a nearby hill, and used their rifle scopes to get a better look at the Iraqis. Stachowski, peering through his lens, said, "Geoff, these guys, they're not digging a hole for an I.E.D. I think they're farming."

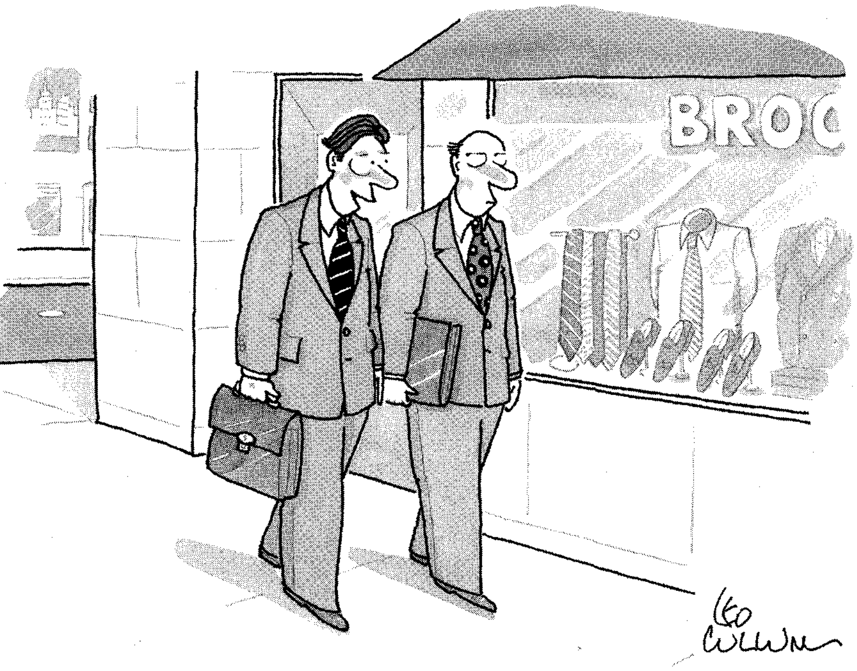
"That's what I'm thinking," Kugler said.

The snipers informed Horne, who, they recalled, bluntly ordered them to kill. (Horne told me that he gave orders for the men to be shot only if they appeared to be behaving like combatants.) They looked at each other with concern. "I did not see a reason to kill the men at that time," Kugler later told military investigators. "I looked at Stack and said, 'Hey, this is fucked up.' I told him, 'Shoot and miss. Scare them.'" The snipers fired about five shots into the dirt, far short of the Iraqis. Stachowski recalled, "It would have been murder, and Geoff knew that. I knew that. Lieutenant Horne, probably deep down, knew that."

Horne's soldiers, with help from members of the Iraqi Army, detained the men in the field—who were, in fact, farming—and took them to the village, where the unit was still clearing the area. In a house at the south end of the village, the Rakkasans found a man, his wife, and three children. The man, who identified himself as a "sheikh," was heavyset, with a bushy beard; he invited them inside, and told them that Al Qaeda fighters came to the village every few weeks, forcing the locals to house and feed them while they trained nearby. He said that none of the fighters had been in the village for several days, but he spoke of a gas station, several miles away, where Al Qaeda members had meetings. Horne asked when the Al Qaeda fighters gathered there. The sheikh looked at his watch and said, "Right now."

Horne decided to raid the gas station and bring the sheikh with him to identify Al Qaeda fighters. A soldier who was at the sheikh's house later wrote, in a sworn statement, that Horne announced, "We are going to a gas station and killing everyone in it, and levelling the gas station." (Horne does not recall making this statement.) From his Humvee, Horne radioed Captain Hart and, explaining that he had detained an informant who was able to identify insurgents, asked permission to move to a new objective. Hart said yes, and dispatched two Apache helicopters to Horne's location for support. The request made sense to him; Special Forces had targeted the area for a raid earlier in the morning, but then had cancelled it at the last minute. Horne left the village with four Humvees and a dozen or so soldiers. As the group headed south, he worried about the potential dangers ahead. How would so few of his men handle a complement of Al Qaeda fighters?

The convoy arrived at the settlement with the gas station at around eleven o'clock. People stared at the Humvees as they drove by, and their demeanor did not seem welcoming. Men loitering near the gas station began to scatter. A few of them drove away in vehicles. The Humvees cordoned off the building, where half a dozen of Horne's soldiers encountered an unarmed Iraqi man sitting on the curb. He was dressed in a white dishdasha, and his hands were either in his



"I'm still spending a lot of money, but I'm spending it ironically."

Gahan Wilson

"I much prefer the snow!"

• •

lap or holding a newspaper—the soldiers' memories differ. Horne, who had stayed in his Humvee, saw the Iraqi man, too. "I sort of got scared, you know, straight up got scared," he told me. "Just from the reporting I got from the sheikh—and knowing what I know of the region, which is why I believed the sheikh—I was expecting an absolute uproar to come out of that village." The sheikh, Horne recalled, had identified the man on the curb as an insurgent leader.

"Kill him!" Horne yelled. "Shoot that man!"

The soldiers looked back to their team leaders.

"Kill him!" Horne repeated.

Horne's men refused. "I remember him distinctly, vividly, telling me to shoot," one told me. "The guy was about fifty yards away from me, sitting on the curb, hands in his lap. I am not in any danger from him, he is not posing any danger to me. And for somebody to look at me, and say, 'Kill that motherfucker, right there!'" A squad leader shouted, "No." A sergeant, Nathan Beal, also protested. The Rakkasans detained the man and entered the gas station, where they found and detained several more men.

By then, a number of things were happening at once. According to Stachowski and a sniper scout named Josh Fuson, Horne gave orders to shoot the detainees inside the gas station—to "kill everyone over there." (Horne denies this.) At about the same time, the sheikh told Horne that there were insurgents in a residential compound across the street, and Horne tried to arrange for a helicopter to attack the building with a Hellfire missile. One of the unit's gunners suggested shooting tracer bullets at the roof that they wanted the helicopters to attack, and began firing an MK-19 grenade launcher that was fixed to the top of the Humvee. Meanwhile, Iraqis continued to flee the area, by vehicle or on foot.

Horne ordered his soldiers to fire at the fleeing vehicles and the residential compound, and nearly everyone began shooting. He told me that a truck had appeared to be approaching two of his men. Other soldiers who were there said that the shots were fired to stop people from driving away. A number of Rakkasans who were in the gas station rushed out to the street, where, because of all the shooting, they concluded that their unit was under attack. Fuson recalled, "Dust and smoke were so thick, we could not clearly see the targets." He took cover near a vehicle, and began shooting in the direction where he gauged other soldiers to be firing, but he stopped after about six rounds because he sensed that nobody was shooting back. He told a soldier near him to stop, too.

Although the shooting lasted less than a minute, nearly seven hundred rounds of ammunition were fired. When the MK-19 gunner noticed a small green truck and a white sedan pulling away, he emptied the remainder of his ammunition—about twenty rounds—into them. The driver of the truck was shot in the chest. A woman in the car was wounded in the arm. She began screaming. Two Iraqis in a blue semi-truck had also attempted to drive away. Horne's men fired at its tires and engine block. The driver jumped out of the cab and ran. Amid the hail of bullets, he fell.

Sergeant Beal noticed that there were women and children amid the fleeing men, and he ordered everyone to hold fire. "What the hell were you shooting at?" he yelled at Horne. "If there is a kid over there, I'm kicking someone's ass." Horne responded that he was protecting the unit; one soldier remembers him saying, "Fuck that, it's collateral damage." (When investigators questioned Horne about the comment, he admitted using the term "collateral damage," but could not recall how. "It was something foolish that came out of my mouth during the heat of the moment," he said. "I regret saying it.") Only later did it become apparent that none of the Iraqis in the area had fired a weapon. Five were wounded.

As the smoke cleared, some Rakkasans walked over to the semi-truck, and nearby they found the driver: a large man with a beard, face down in the dirt. He was clearly dead, Stachowski later recalled: "I saw some grit or sand in his wide-open eyes." Stachowski sensed that a moral boundary had been crossed. He believed that he had seen bullets enter the driver's body after he had fallen to the ground. Was the driver mortally wounded when he fell? Did he dive down in self-preservation, or to surrender? If the Rakkasans had initiated fire without adequate cause, then, on some level, hadn't the driver been murdered?

Shortly after the shooting stopped, First Sergeant Geressy and twenty-two soldiers arrived, in two Black Hawk helicopters. Geressy, finding Horne frantically tending to wounded Iraqis, asked him, "What the fuck is going on?" Horne could not provide a clear response, so Geressy took command of the unit. He prepared the soldiers to search the compound across from the gas station. "Unless you are fired at, no firing," he told them. "See all these water tanks on the roof? That means that there are fucking people, probably families, living in there. Slow it down, take it easy, and we'll see what we get." Families were, in fact, living there, but the soldiers also detained sixty-four men, including Iraqis from Falluja, three men with ties to Al Qaeda, and Abdullah—the high-value target—who had attempted to escape while cradling a baby.

An After Action Review was held several days after the incident. Lieutenant Horne expressed regret to his men for losing control, and thanked Sergeant Beal for calling the ceasefire. Not everyone there believed Horne's sincerity, but the Army did. He was issued a reprimand, which was not included in his permanent file, and the following year he was promoted to captain. He left the military earlier this year. "You just don't want to kill someone," he told me. "It was the worst day of my life. Not a day goes by when I don't think about it."

A QUICK DECISION

Early the same morning, twenty-eight helicopters took off from the base near Tikrit and flew toward the Al Muthanna complex. Some seventy members of Charlie Company were on board seven of the aircraft, which were heading for Objective Murray, on the island with the mud huts. Colonel Steele rode with the Rakkasans going to the island. Though Captain Hart was in charge of the company, Steele wanted to accompany the men who he expected would face the greatest danger. "It's important for them to know I'm not sitting in a plane somewhere," he later told military investigators. "I'm going to come in with them."

Amid the whirring drone of the helicopter blades, some soldiers tried to lessen their anxiety by telling jokes; others slept. The helicopters banked over the southern end of the island at around 5 A.M.—six hours before the incident at the gas station. First Sergeant Geressy, who was in one of the helicopters, was helping to guide this mission as well. Looking out the window at the predawn sky, he saw tracer shots arcing from the ground toward him. He removed his night-vision goggles and saw them again. Geressy recalled saying to himself, "This is for real, the intel isn't bullshit." The helicopters landed on the island some distance from the huts. A member of Charlie Company spoke to me about what it is like to jump off an aircraft and head into unknown peril: "Your senses become heightened. Your ears, your smell, your taste become a lot sharper. You can't see in the dark before, but as soon as you hit the ground and are ready to roll you can see in the dark just fine."

The members of Charlie Company ran into the darkness, ready to confront an enemy that, they were told, was bloodthirsty and irreconcilable. And they fired their weapons as they ran, until they realized that they weren't shooting at anyone. The site was abandoned. "Just your typical, adobe-shithole, mud-shack buildings," Geressy recalled. "Like something maybe Jesus was living in." Steele and his senior staff members gathered some distance from the huts while members of Charlie Company searched the area.

The sky lightened into shades of blue. Several gunners climbed onto the roof of one hut. From there, they saw a house three hundred yards away. Through a window, the glow of an oil lamp was visible. Hart ordered his third platoon to search the hut. As the soldiers approached the door, the gunners on the roof fired at the distant house's lighted window. Geressy, who was with the third platoon, immediately got on his radio and called a ceasefire. "We don't know what the fuck is in those buildings," he recalled. "We didn't get fire from those buildings, and the enemy on the ground is not the enemy we were briefed on. You gotta be able to switch gears right away. Worst thing I want is we're shooting up a fucking building with women and kids." The platoon soon surrounded the lighted house. Nobody was there. Adrenaline had been wasted, and some of the men were disappointed.

While the soldiers secured the mud huts, Hart and his senior staff began setting up a makeshift command post. The pilot of an Apache flying overhead radioed Hart to say that he could see three men in a small motorboat racing away from the shore near the huts. There were several other boats on the water, but they were stationary, and Hart concluded that they were fishing boats. It was possible, though, that the men in the moving boat had just run out of the house with the lamp, but it was too dark to tell if they were armed. Steele had told his men to shoot anyone at Objective Murray who was fleeing across the river; militants in the area had used boats as escape vehicles before. Hart later recalled, "I made a quick decision." He relayed an order to shoot to the Apache's gunner, who killed the men as they disembarked on the opposite side of the canal. The men apparently fell into the water and were pulled downstream. Later, Steele and his staff looked for the bodies but found none.

Once Charlie Company secured Objective Murray, the unit fractured into smaller groups, and descended into the mission's darkest hour. All large military operations bear the markings of both their planners and the soldiers who carry those plans out. It is the collective nature of violence in war, the shared culpability, that partly allows soldiers to find it within themselves to kill. Colonel Steele understood this. Part of "Psychological Inoculation of Combat"—his addendum to the Fort Campbell training program—was based on a book by retired Lieutenant Colonel David Grossman, "On Killing," copies of which he bought and distributed to his brigade. Grossman observes that most soldiers, even when confronted with mortal danger, hesitate before pulling the trigger; but this wariness, he argues, can be greatly overcome with conditioning. During the Korean War, American soldiers fired their weapons at a rate more than twice that of soldiers in the Second World War, and in Vietnam the rate was nearly double what it was in Korea.

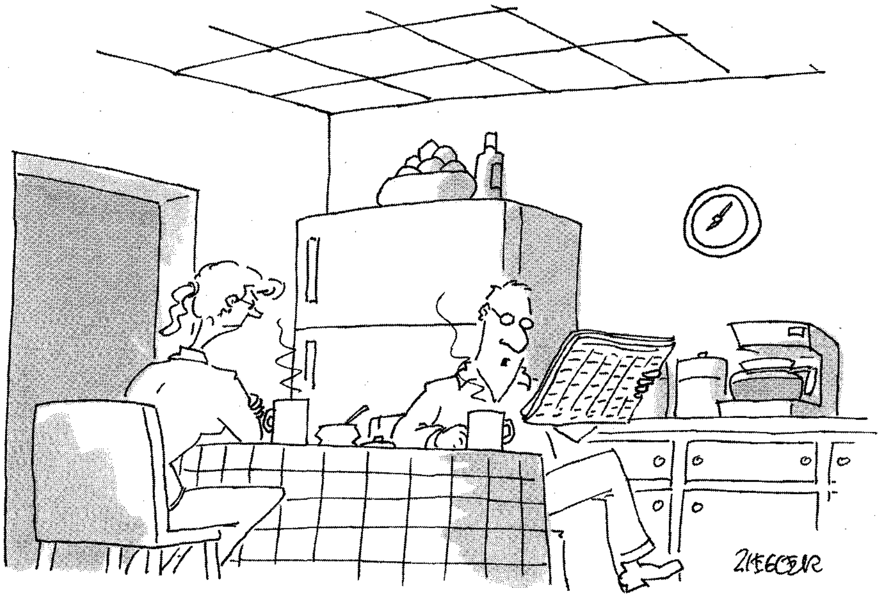
Since Vietnam, as deployments have become more complex, enemies less conventional, and moral lines less immediately clear, Western armies have struggled to calibrate the many psychological pressures placed on soldiers. As the military historian Richard Holmes has written, if "men reflect too deeply upon their enemy's common humanity, then they risk being unable to proceed with a task whose aims may be eminently just and legitimate." However, if the enemy is depersonalized too much, "the restraints on human behavior in war are swept aside." Steele left Objective Murray shortly after he landed on the island, returning to the command center near the Al Muthanna complex. It remains bitterly debated, however, whether his command guidance was connected to the deaths that followed.

After its initial assault, Charlie Company spread out across the island. Captain Hart sent his infantrymen to nearby mud huts to insure that they, too, did not house insurgents. He sent his third platoon, along with a unit of Iraqi soldiers, to investigate a couple of houses three miles north of Objective Murray. Every platoon comprises two or more squads, and the leader of the platoon's third squad was Ray Girouard, a twenty-three-year-old staff sergeant from eastern Tennessee. Girouard's father drifted away from his family when he was young, and in 1989 his mother died in a car accident. Raised by his grandparents, he left high school early (he later completed a G.E.D.), and entered the military in August, 2001. Girouard graduated from Ranger school, and in evaluations he was uniformly commended. He taught himself Arabic. His platoon leader, Lieutenant Justin Wehrheim, regarded him as one of the best squad leaders in the unit. By May, 2006, he was halfway through his second combat tour.

To his men, Girouard had been a mentor and a friend; because of his rapid promotion, he was not much older than the soldiers beneath him, and at times he appeared to trade discipline for affection. On one patrol, members of his unit goofed around by a canal, and one jumped in for a swim. A few soldiers told me that Girouard kept an AK-47 in his Humvee, and that he had told his men to use it as a "drop weapon" at the scene of an illegitimate kill, should they need a cover story. Whether or not this was bravado is hard to say. A soldier who had been on patrol with Girouard's squad said that his men sometimes confiscated alcohol from locals and drank it. In the weeks before Operation Iron Triangle, it appeared, Girouard had become worn down; several members of Charlie Company recalled him abusing military-issue Valium. The soldier recalled an incident on patrol: "He was in the Humvee, knocked out."

Girouard checked in with Lieutenant Wehrheim, who ordered him to gather his men and prepare to head north from the mud huts. "I said, 'Roger, sir, what about R.O.E.?'" Girouard later testified. "He said it still applied. Basically, like, 'Hey, idiot, it still applies.'" Then, as the sky began to brighten, Girouard and his men took off in a Black Hawk.

Minutes later, they landed several



"Have you heard about the tree falling in the forest, but no one hears it, because some guy's wife won't stop talking?"

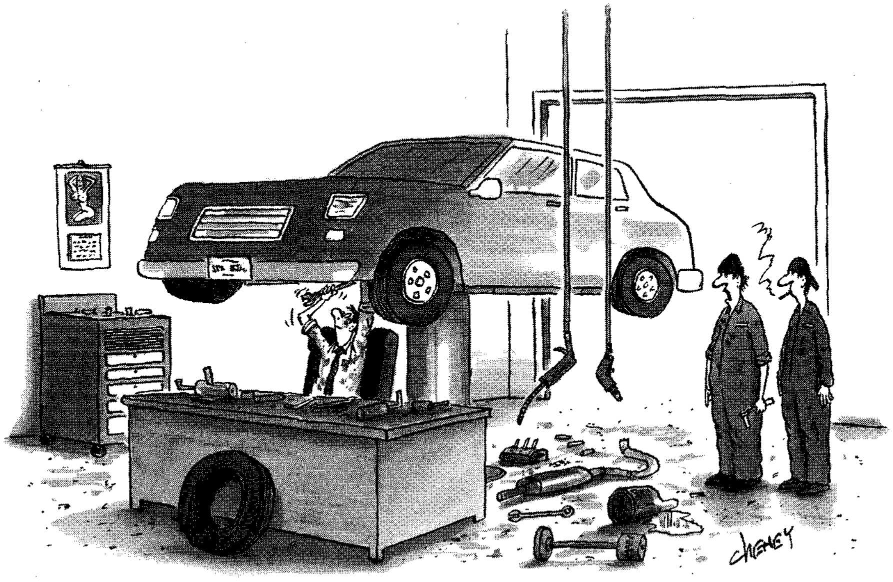
hundred feet from a house with a thatched roof. Girouard led his squad toward it, sprinting ahead of his men. "I noticed movement in the first window—maybe a male, maybe a white sheet," he recalled later. He fired his gun at the window. "It did not matter if he was armed or not," Girouard explained. "He was a military-aged male, and we were told to kill all military-aged males." Other soldiers fired, too, and followed Girouard inside. "The first thing I seen were these three men holding two women as human shields," William Hunsaker, a specialist from Missouri, later recalled. "I mean, physically holding them by their dresses." Two of the "men" were, in fact, teen-agers. On the floor near a window in the next room was an old man—Jasim Hassan Komar-Abdullah, whose body Steele later inspected at the temporary command center. Komar-Abdullah was bleeding profusely.

"We have one down in here," Hunsaker called out.

Girouard approached Komar-Abdullah. "He had maybe two or three breaths," he testified. Hunsaker and another soldier, Sergeant Leonel Lemus, began to take the man outside, so that a medic could treat him, but as they dragged him toward the door Girouard said, "Stop. He's about to go."

The women in the house had become hysterical, and several Iraqi soldiers who had arrived tried to comfort them. The Iraqis learned that two of the three men who had been hiding behind the women were related to Komar-Abdullah, and one of the women was his daughter. The American soldiers ushered the men outside. When Hunsaker and Lemus began escorting the women outside, Girouard yelled, "What the fuck are you doing? Put the women back in there." He added, "Go put a veil, or go put a sheet over their head—something. I don't want them to see. This could be their father." Hunsaker and Lemus covered the women's heads. Moments later, a medic, looking at Komar-Abdullah, said, "He's gone."

The unit conveyed the news of Komar-Abdullah's death to Lieutenant Wehrheim, who, in turn, radioed First Sergeant Geressy to inform him that Girouard's squad had killed one man and detained three others. Geressy, who was at the island command post, says that he was under the impression that insurgents had attacked Girouard's soldiers.



"I hate retraining C.E.O.s."

"Why do I have three fucking detainees that should have been killed?" he asked Wehrheim.

"I'm not sure what happened," Wehrheim said.

"O.K.," Geressy said. He ordered Wehrheim to prepare the detainees to board a helicopter that would deliver them to the command post for questioning.

Word spread among Girouard's squad that Geressy had said that the detainees should have been killed. "Everybody got a kick out of it," Lemus later recalled. "I laughed, too."

While Girouard's men were photographing the detainees for Army records, Iraqi soldiers at the scene began arguing with the Americans about Komar-Abdullah's death. "This incident makes the people, the citizens, hate us," an Iraqi sergeant later explained at a military hearing. Several Iraqis tried to speak with the detainees, who had been bound with zip ties and blindfolded, and were spread out, face down, near the hut. They were unsure whether the detainees—Akhmed Farhim Hamid al-Jemi, and the two teen-agers—were insurgents. The Iraqi sergeant recalled, "We told them, 'If you guys are innocent, you will get released.'"

Leaving Komar-Abdullah's house, Girouard's soldiers climbed over a nearby berm, and discovered an adobe-brick house partly enclosed by a chicken-wire fence. An orange carpet was draped over the fence, and a cow wandered nearby.

Girouard ordered his men to approach the house, but this time to shoot over it, to avoid killing noncombatants. After the soldiers began firing, a middle-aged Iraqi with a mustache emerged from a rear doorway. Wearing a white headdress and a dishdasha, he held a baby girl in his arms. He appeared to be using the girl as a human shield, lifting her body up and down to prevent the soldiers from firing at him. "Put the baby down!" Girouard yelled in Arabic, but the man did not comply. The soldiers rushed forward and grabbed the baby. "The fact that he came out with a little girl as a shield just pissed me off, so I wound up dragging him by his damn hair into his damn hut, and started whooping the shit out of him," Hunsaker later recalled. Lemus joined Hunsaker in the hut and punched the man several times. ("I was disgusted by him," he later said.) Girouard, standing outside, heard the sounds of the man being beaten. He, too, was livid; he later testified that the baby girl had caused him to think of his own infant son. But as a combat photographer came over the berm Girouard told his men to stop the abuse. They searched the premises and found nothing suspicious; leaving a soldier behind as a guard, they returned to Komar-Abdullah's house.

In the heightened atmosphere of a military operation, seemingly inconsequential incidents can have a pronounced psychological effect. All soldiers must see killing as purposeful, even honorable, in order to cope with it; the Iraqi villager, by using the baby as a human shield, had seemingly twisted this moral framework. The squad had been told by the Army that the villager was a brute deserving death. Yet had they killed the baby they would have become brutes themselves. In "On Killing," David Grossman observes, "The presence of women and children can inhibit aggression in combat, but only if the women and children are not threatened. If they become threatened, and if the combatant accepts responsibility for them, then the psychology of battle changes from one of carefully constrained ceremonial combat among males to the unconstrained ferocity of an animal who is defending its den."

It is difficult to say precisely what followed, in part because of conflicting memories. Five soldiers testified that Girouard called his squad inside Komar-Abdullah's house, to discuss killing the detainees. Nobody has exact recollections of the discussion, or of the motivation, but all agree on its general substance, and that Girouard was more fraternal than commanding. Lemus told me, "He brought us into the room, kind of said, 'O.K., bring it in,' and he says, 'Hey, we're gonna go ahead'—he's kinda pausing in between words—and he's like, 'Hey, we're gonna go ahead and change the zip ties and, you know, we're gonna go ahead and do these guys.' " Two of the soldiers at the meeting may have said that they had wanted to kill the men. Lemus and another infantryman, Juston Graber, walked out because they didn't want to have anything to do with it.

After the squad disbanded, Girouard had an exchange with another soldier who had objected to the idea of killing detainees. "I said it was murder," the soldier testified. "He said that I just murdered somebody. I said, 'How?' He goes, 'The man in the window.' I was like, 'That's not murder. That is a K.I.A.'"—killed in action. "Pretty much then, the firing started."

TWIN CITIES

It was the river that made them two—
The mills on one side,
The cathedral on the other.

We watched its swift currents:
If we stared long enough, maybe
It would stop cold and let us

Skate across to the other side.
It never froze in place—though
I once knew a kid, a wild funny

Girl who built a raft from branches
(Which promptly sank a few feet out
From the elbow bend off Dayton's Bluff),

Who made it seem easy to believe.
We'd tried to break into Carver's Cave,
Where bootleggers hid their hot stash

Years after the Dakota drew their snakes
And bears on the rock walls and canoed
Inside the caverns. We knew there were

Two infantrymen performed the executions. One of them was William Hunsaker, the specialist. Just before Operation Iron Triangle, he was told that he would be promoted. His platoon sergeant considered him to be "one of the better soldiers that I had." He was admired for his discipline and work ethic—he once cleaned up the remains of Iraqis who had been shot in a truck. He read voraciously, and quoted Nietzsche: "Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster." At some point, Hunsaker decided that the three detainees were monsters, and that killing was "a lesser evil for a greater good." He has since said, "The men I killed were terrorists, men who would have done worse to us if the situation was reversed." Even today, he says, he has not lost sleep over the killings. The other soldier, Private First Class Corey Clagett, was known for his lack of discipline and for bragging, and he seemed to take lightly the idea of shooting the detainees. "I thought it was basically like an initiation," he later testified.

Hunsaker and Clagett used a knife to cut the zip ties on the detainees' wrists, then partly lifted the men's blindfolds. Hunsaker looked each detainee in the eye, and gestured for them to run. Al-Jemi and the teen-agers did not understand him, or perhaps they were reluctant to run, so Clagett yelled, "*Yalla!*"—"Hurry," in Arabic—at which point they fled. Clagett threw the knife in their direction, hoping to create the impression that one of them had dropped it while escaping.

Hunsaker shot the youngest detainee first. "I was going to make it quick, and as painless as possible for him," he later testified. "So I took careful aim and shot the first one through the heart and the back, and shot him in the head." Hunsaker shot a second detainee through the chest. Then, he recalled, "Clagett opened up fire, and just sprayed bullets, eventually fatally wounding the third, before I could get a shot at him."

Hunsaker felt disoriented. He removed his helmet, walked back to Komar-Abdullah's house, and squatted in the doorway. He put his face in his hands to control his feelings. "I was angry at Clagett," he recalled. "If you are going to do it, you know, do it right. There is no sense in causing the extra

Other openings in the cliffs, mirroring
Those same rock faces on the other shore—
And below them the caves, the subterranean

Pathways underlying the talk and commerce,
The big shot churches, undermining the false
Maidenliness of the convent school from which

My friend was eventually expelled for being
Too smart and standing up for her own smartness.
Too late, I salute you, Katy McNally. I think

That the river returned then to two-sidedness—
An overhung history of bottle-flash and hopelessness.
I see you still—laughing as the lashed sticks

Sank beneath you, laughing as you did
That morning when the river lifted
Its spring shoulders, shrugging off

The winter ice, that thin brittle mirage,
Making you believe
We were all in this together.

—*Carol Muske-Dukes*

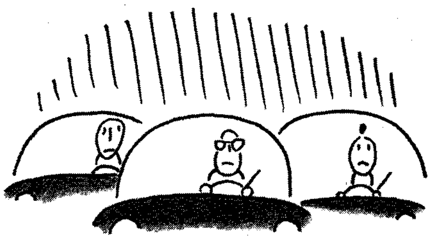
suffering by just spraying bullets." Clagett, who had not killed anyone before, later told a psychiatrist that during the shooting his "mind just went blank."

At the sound of the gunfire, the rest of the squad ran over; when Girouard saw the bodies, he turned pale. One of the detainees had somehow survived the shooting, and Graber—one of the infantrymen who had objected earlier—recalled Girouard telling him, "Put him out of his misery." Graber, focussing on the dying detainee's strained breathing, fatally shot him.

GONE

Later that day, at the command center near Samarra, Steele examined the blindfolded bodies of the detainees and immediately ordered an investigation. At the time, he says, he did not know the circumstances of the deaths. The soldiers involved in the murders had concocted a false account, claiming that the detainees had broken free of their restraints. Girouard had punched Clagett in the face, and had cut Hunsaker with a knife, to make it appear as though they had been attacked. The detainees had supposedly been shot while escaping.

After the operation, Steele returned to the United States, on leave. While he was away, a rumor made its way to General Chiarelli's office that Steele had attempted to cover up the execution of detainees during Operation Iron Triangle. A private, who earlier had tested positive for cocaine, accused Steele of stepping on the head of a corpse at the temporary command center while posing for a trophy picture, and of saying, "We need more bodies" and "We'll have to say these guys tried to escape." The accusations could not have circulated at a more inauspicious time for the brigade. They followed the revelation, in March, 2006, of the Haditha massacre and other war crimes involving Americans. Chiarelli was deeply troubled by the Haditha case—he had read through the investigative materials—and this no doubt strengthened his resolve to act when word of abuses within Steele's unit reached his office. When members of Charlie Company later gave sworn statements about Operation Iron Triangle's rules of engagement—which, they had said, was to "kill all military-age males on the island"—the order appeared to echo the disastrous "free-fire zones" of Vietnam.



Chiarelli appointed Brigadier General Thomas Maffey, from the Fourth Infantry Division, to investigate Steele. After considering the testimony of many witnesses, Maffey determined that Steele "did not condone or attempt to cover up detainee deaths," and that the private's other accusations were unfounded. (The private later told the Army that he was not "a hundred per cent" sure of his recollections.) Maffey concluded that Steele should have reported the blindfolded bodies to his superiors more quickly—a procedural infraction, not a war crime—and that Steele had not been "crystal clear" about the operation's rules of engagement. The miscommunication, he said, might have resulted in the deaths of unarmed people.

Maffey argued that Steele had honestly and reasonably believed that he could designate as a terrorist everyone at Objective Murray, because the potential for human collateral damage there had been estimated by the Army to be zero, and in such circumstances General Turner had delegated to lower-level officers his authority to attack such a target. But Maffey also said that Steele had failed to consider a fundamental aspect of the Law of War: that even if a group of people in a geographic area can be legitimately targeted, combatants must be individually identified when the means permit it. "Dropping a bomb or firing missiles does not permit this type of individual distinction," he concluded. "Apparently, Colonel Steele and his soldiers thought that if Objective Murray could be engaged with bombs and missiles, it could be engaged in the same manner using individual and crew-served weapons." In his zeal to protect his soldiers, Maffey seemed to suggest, Steele had lost sight of their capacity for moral discrimination.

Even so, Maffey's findings were more

"After your tomato plants, you have nothing left over for me."

forgiving than they might have been, as they suffered from the confusion that Objective Murray had encompassed the entire island. It took months for the military to sort out that Objective Murray constituted only the two empty mud huts, and that none of the killings had occurred there.

The Army ultimately decided that five of the deaths were not murders. But in the summer of 2006, after members of Charlie Company came forward with information about the conspiracy to execute the captives, prosecutors deemed the killing of the three detainees worthy of military courts. Hearings were set for Hunsaker, Clagett, Girouard, and Graber. For a brief time, the prosecutors trying the four soldiers pursued the death penalty—making theirs the first capital cases in the war—but the Army eventually settled on life sentences. (In Iraq and Afghanistan, there have been fewer than a dozen war crimes ending in murder convictions. In the Haditha case, all the murder charges were dropped.) In January, 2007, Hunsaker and Clagett pleaded guilty to murder, and Graber pleaded guilty to aggravated assault. In exchange for coöperating with the prosecutors, they received reduced sentences: eighteen years for Hunsaker and Clagett, and nine months for Graber. As part of their plea agreements, all of them stipulated that the rules of engagement were not a factor in the murder of the detainees.

Girouard, who was prosecuted for murder, was convicted of negligent homicide. The conviction may have reflected the jury's uncertainty about what was said during the huddle—whether he gave orders to kill the detainees, or simply allowed others to kill them. Or it may have reflected the jury's reluctance to sentence Girouard to life when the soldiers who actually shot the detainees had negotiated for less severe punishment. Either way, the verdict had the appearance of a legal compromise. Girouard is the first American soldier to be convicted of negligent homicide resulting from the actions of subordinates in combat. He is serving a ten-year sentence at Fort Leavenworth.

Despite their plea agreements, the three soldiers who are now imprisoned refuse to accept full culpability for their actions, and hope to share some blame with Steele. In a petition for clemency, Hunsaker recently wrote that, though his decision to kill the detainees was unjustified, "it is not fair for the men above me, the men who gave the orders, to do less time, or none at all." Clagett has echoed this view. Girouard is appealing his case. He insists that he never orchestrated the huddle, never told Graber to put anyone out of his misery, never described the AK-47 as a "drop weapon," and never heard Geressy's comment that the detainees should have been killed. Girouard accepts guilt only for helping Hunsaker and Clagett cover up their crime, which he says he did out of loyalty. In his appeal, he is also seeking to make the rules of engagement an issue—to demonstrate that Hunsaker and Clagett were motivated to kill largely because of the speech Steele had given just prior to this operation, "suggesting that we should take no prisoners."

Not long after Operation Iron Triangle, General Chiarelli sought to relieve Steele of his command, but the leadership of the 101st Airborne resisted. And so, on July 11, 2006, before all the deaths had been fully evaluated by the military, Chiarelli formally reprimanded Steele. Because it was evident that Steele had technically followed the rules of engagement, the reprimand carefully faulted Steele for his "intricate and questionable" interpretation of the rules, and noted that he had been unclear with his soldiers, resulting in the deaths of "five unarmed people." (In a later version, Chiarelli referred to "five innocent people," though he never specified which five.) Chiarelli argued that the deaths would not have occurred had Steele considered the "second- and third-order effects" of his actions, writing, "Your acts, omissions, and personal example have created a command climate where irresponsible behavior appears to have been allowed to go unchecked." Chiarelli called Steele to Baghdad to discuss the reprimand, and, according to Steele, said that he would be calling the operation "Haditha II." A soldier familiar with the meeting told me that, afterward, "Steele vowed retribution against several members of the Corps staff."

Steele wrote a lengthy rebuttal, implying that Chiarelli had long wanted to destroy his career because of their personal and doctrinal differences. Steele enumerated the intelligence that shaped his decision-making, and argued that his interpretation of the rules of engagement was unimpeachable. The three men in the boat, he wrote, were fleeing a known Al Qaeda haven, and Komar-Abdullah's death was the "result of an individual soldier's judgment call" and could not have resulted from "purported confusion over R.O.E.," because it occurred outside the limited purview of Objective Murray. It made more sense, he said, to blame "the state of mind of the individual soldier." Moreover, Steele said, if he had wanted soldiers to kill detainees, why did Girouard and his men hide their actions? Could he rightfully be blamed for deliberate criminal behavior? And if these soldiers' failures were a reflection of his command culture, then what about the many Rakkasans who, as even Maffey had pointed out, "demonstrated restraint in the application of force?"

One could make the case that Operation Iron Triangle displayed more discipline than recklessness. During the three-day mission, hundreds of Iraqis were detained without incident, and when soldiers were presented with morally confusing situations, or the opportunity to do something that seemed unlawful, many of them either refused to kill or prevented others from acting wrongly. Quantifying the level of discipline in a unit as large as a brigade is not easy, but, according to Army data, the number of Rakkasan escalation-of-force incidents in 2006 was below the median for brigades in Iraq.

After Maffey's investigation, a lengthy inquiry into the brigade's command culture resulted in a delicately worded assessment. Its findings, dated August 23, 2006, noted that Steele "continually told soldiers they must be prepared to use deadly force without hesitation, within the boundaries of the law." And though it was "clearly possible that some soldiers, especially young, inexperienced ones, could misinterpret the message," Steele's leadership had not "encouraged illegal, wanton, or superfluous killing."

Lieutenant Colonel Richard Root, one of Steele's former battalion commanders, told me, "There are people that are extreme loyalists to Michael Steele: he did no wrong. 'Yes, he had this bravado around him, but that was to lead soldiers.' And they love him. They would follow him in combat again, and have really limited their careers by continuing to be loyal to Michael Steele. Then you have people who say, 'He doesn't get it. He's dumb. He doesn't appreciate the change, and he is just focussed on killing.' And then you are going to have the person who says, 'He's a smart guy, he really does get it, he believes in core principles, but I don't necessarily agree with him.' That's me. So I am not a Michael Steele lover. I think that in his mind, and in his experience, from losing soldiers in combat before, as I have done, too, he thought that he was doing the best thing that he could for the entire Brigade Combat Team. And no doubt he thought he was making the best decisions at the time for his soldiers. His soldiers, to him, were everything. He did not want soldiers to ever pause and not rely on their training and get killed because they had doubt in their mind about who was bad and who was good. He could not live with that."

Steele will most likely retire as a colonel. (Chiarelli refused to rescind the reprimand.) But he is still serving. He has returned to Georgia, and is stationed at Fort McPherson, where he advises other units on training. He keeps in touch with the wounded veterans of his brigade; he takes them hunting, and helps insure that they get proper medical treatment. During his deployment in Iraq, Steele saw eighteen of his soldiers killed in action—the same number as in Somalia. The brigades that preceded and replaced the Rakkasans each lost more than twice as many men. Soldiers close to Steele say that he is deeply attached to that statistic. While in Iraq, he had appropriated millions of dollars' worth of metal left in an Army warehouse, and on some nights he joined his welders, who used it to "up-armor" Humvees. On the final day of Steele's command, nearly three thousand Rakkasans waited in the rain to shake his hand.

Earlier this year, Steele travelled to Savannah and gave a speech to the Georgia Farm Bureau about the Army. Rattling off the names of infantrymen he did not bring back, he flushed. "I want to tell you about Lieutenant Dennis Zilinski, and I wish Dennis was here today," Steele said. "Dennis is an all-American kid. He is from New Jersey." Zilinski, he said, was a committed student who had attended West Point. One day, Zilinski, who led his college swim team, went to a meet; as he approached the swimming facility, he noticed a group of parents ahead of him. "Being a good cadet, gentleman that he was, he jogged out in front of them and opened the door," Steele said. "And as they filed past, one of those dads made a little quip. He said, 'You better open that door for me. My tax dollars are paying for your education.' This comment by this dad drove him—it compelled Dennis to redouble his efforts. He worked harder, he worked longer, and when he got to the unit, and other lieutenants were doing something else, Dennis was studying to make sure he was worthy of the responsibility to lead those young men in combat."

Steele's voice gathered force. "On 19 November, 2005, as I was working in my tactical operations center in Bayji, Iraq, there was an explosion four miles away on what we had named Smugglers Road," he said. "I wish Dennis were here today to tell you what it means to wear this uniform. What it means to defend our nation, to defend our borders, to defend our families, to defend our values, to defend our way of life. Words would come out of that young man's mouth, like 'duty,' 'honor,' 'country.' On that day, 19 November, 2005, Dennis, Staff Sergeant Karolasz, Specialist Hinton, and Corporal Blair, who were in the truck—they were all killed when their truck hit a buried explosive device." Steele's sentences became clipped, each one louder and more forceful than the last. "Now, here is a young man. He is intellectually gifted. He is an N.C.A.A. athlete. He is charismatic beyond belief. He has got his whole career in front of him. He is engaged to be married. He is truly a future leader of this nation—" Steele's voice dropped to a whisper. "And he is gone," he said. "He is gone." ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Audio slide show: Operation Iron Triangle.

PROFILES

NORA KNOWS WHAT TO DO

The filmmaker foodie pays homage to Julia Child.

BY ARIEL LEVY

Size matters. If you are over six feet tall, solidly built, and female, your height is not a detail. "I mean, it's like having a clubfoot!" is how Meryl Streep puts it. In Nora Ephron's new movie, "Julie & Julia," Streep plays Julia Child—the looming emissary of French cooking, who, upon arriving for the first time at Le Havre, as a "six-foot-two-inch, thirty-six-year-old, rather loud and unserious Californian," feared that France was a nation "where the women were all dainty, exquisitely coiffed, nasty little creatures," as Child wrote in her memoir. Child's tallness was crucial to Streep as she developed the character. "It was a real unusual thing for a woman to be that height, and I think it had an enormous impact," Streep said. "It was a handicap of sorts, certainly in the world into which she was born, in Pasadena, where women went East to school to get a husband." Julia Child, whose epic contribution to American culture was "Mastering the Art of French Cooking," was a sensuous giant. Who knows who she would have been if she'd come out delicate and married a Republican banker, as her father had expected. We might never have heard of hollandaise.

Nora Ephron came of age three decades after Child, in a house "full of apples and peaches and milk," in Beverly Hills. Size still mattered. In a 1972 essay called "A Few Words About Breasts," Ephron wrote, "If I had them, I would have been a completely different person." Perhaps this is so. If Nora Ephron had been born buxom, what else besides that article might she not have written? Harry might never have met Sally. "Sleepless in Seattle" might mean nothing but Northwestern insomnia.

Ephron is more petite than ever. She is five-six ("or I used to be"), and, at sixty-eight, she is as slight as a sparrow. She loves food, but she eats very, very carefully. ("I watch her eat and I watch me eat and it's like a heavenly princess and a barbarian," Steve Martin, Ephron's friend and the star of one of her early movies, "Mixed Nuts," says.) "I've been in the Zone for a long time," Ephron informed a group of women who had come to see her speak at the 92nd Street Y a few years ago, "and I'm tired of it."

When she is sitting, Ephron folds in on herself—she crosses her legs and holds her chin in her hand—and becomes very compact, a little origami of a person. "She was utterly composed," Ephron's younger sister Delia Ephron wrote in her novel "Hanging Up," describing a character she based on Nora. "She kept still, her arms very close to her body, and although she wasn't tall, she seemed to be looking down at everyone, even when she was sitting."

Ephron isn't cold, but she is queenly: a Jewish dame. Recently, she participated in a panel discussion about "The Future of Filmmaking." After Ephron had unloaded some tart observations, the moderator turned to the actress Anne Hathaway and asked if she had anything to add. "Oh, my God," Hathaway said. "I was intimidated to get onstage with Nora Ephron. You want me to follow her?"

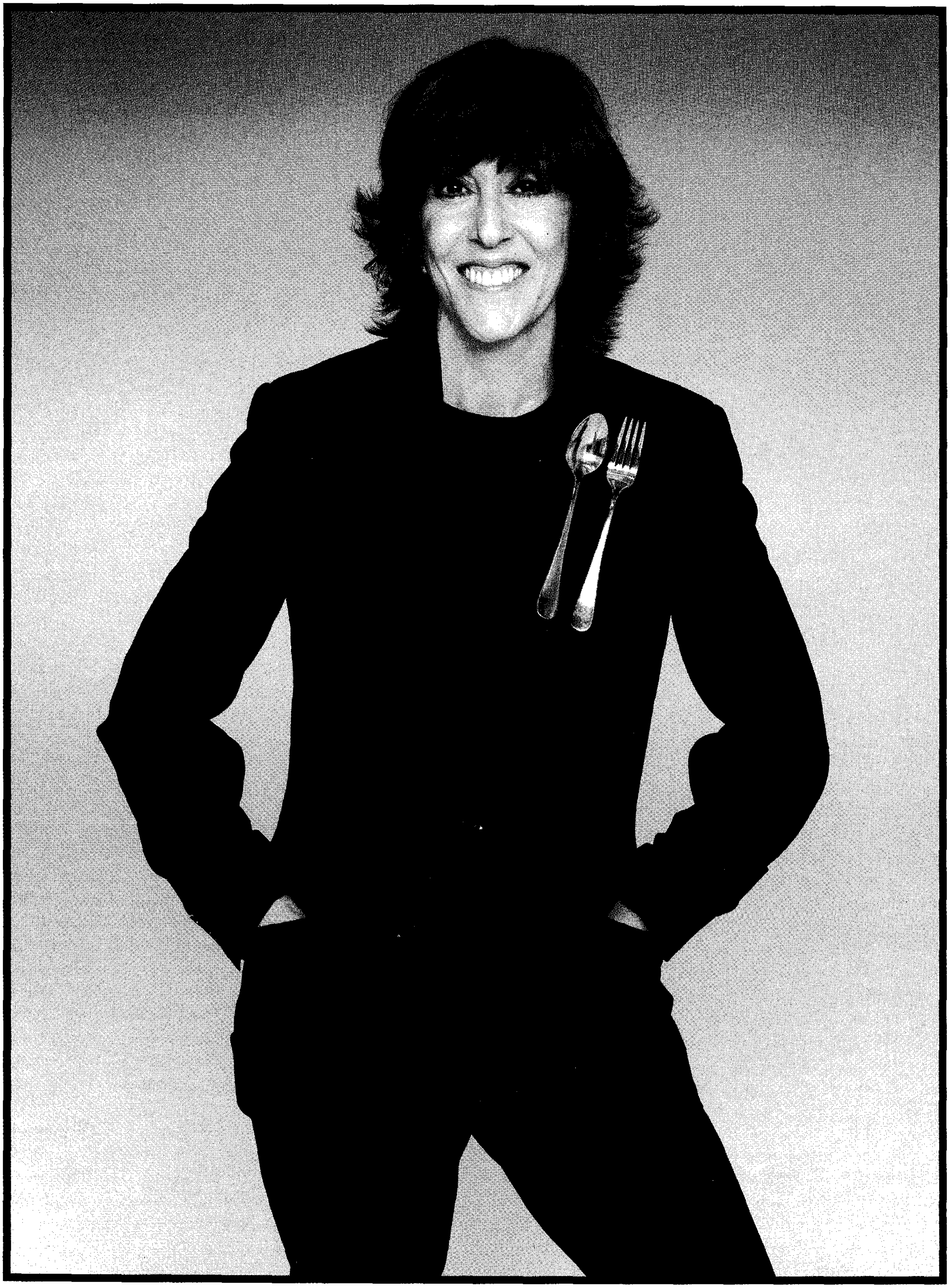
Because of her ladylike bearing and her extraordinary comic timing, people tend to experience Ephron as jaunty and fresh. That does not mean that they are not often slightly afraid of her, too. "I don't know if my first impression was just because she seems like the quintessential New Yorker," Meryl Streep, who met Ephron when they collaborated on "Silkwood," in 1983, said. "She always wears black and she's so cool and she always has the perfect bon mot to toss off just effortlessly. I mean, who can *be* like that? Anyway, I was intimidated."

"She will ask you a question: 'Well, what do you think of so-and-so,'" Tom Hanks told me. "And I always have a little voice inside me saying, 'If she doesn't agree with me, I'm going to be a little crushed.' Because she might say, 'You are *insane*.' Or she might say, '*Exactly*.'" Hanks was the star, with Meg Ryan, of Ephron's second film, the 1993 hit "Sleepless in Seattle," which made Ephron famous as a director. She was already famous for a number of things.

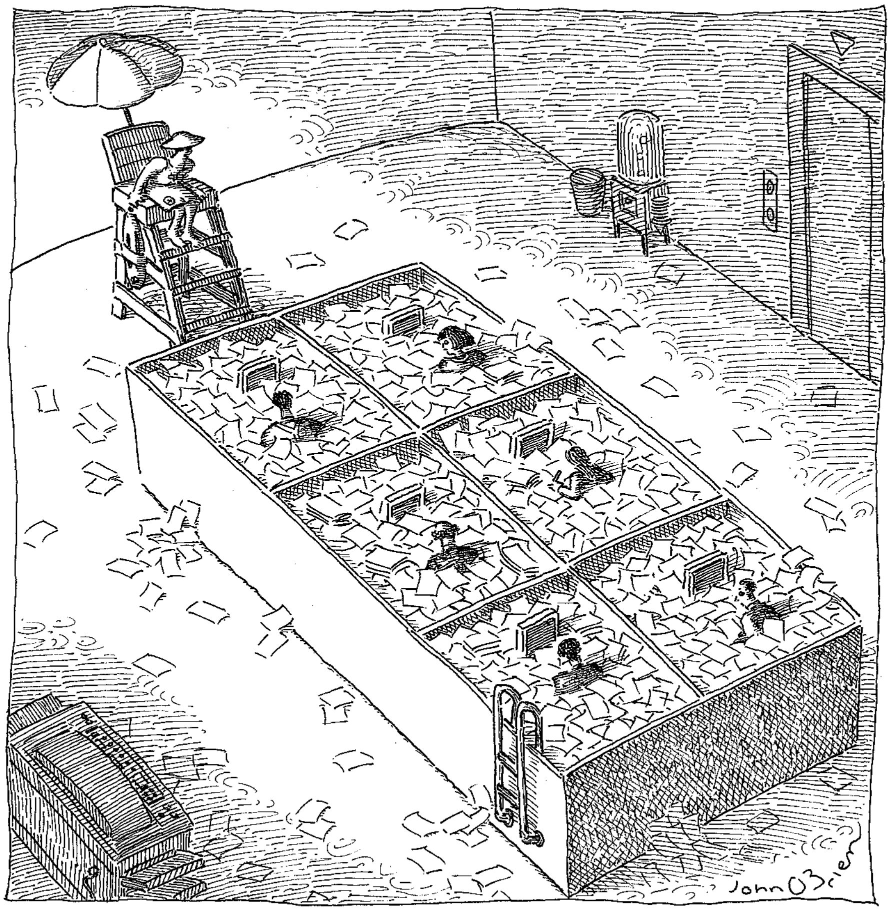
Ephron first became well known in the late nineteen-sixties, as a magazine journalist who wrote features about cultural institutions and media celebrities. Ephron's pieces were vivid and cunning and crackling with her personality; she began an eviscerating profile of Dorothy Schiff, the publisher of the New York *Post*, where she had worked for a time, with the words "I feel bad about what I'm going to do here." In the early nineteen-seventies, Ephron wrote a column in *Esquire* about developments in the burgeoning women's movement. She was the funniest feminist, or pseudofeminist, depending on whom you ask. (Pretty much everyone admits that she was funny.)

Ephron became even more famous in 1976, when she married Carl Bernstein, just a few years after he and Bob Woodward, as reporters for the Washington *Post*, exposed the Watergate scandal. When Ephron wrote "Heartburn," a best-selling roman à clef about walking out on Bernstein after discovering that he was having an affair while she was seven months pregnant with their second child, she grew more famous still. Then she was nominated for an Oscar, with Alice Arlen, for their screenplay for "Silkwood," a film directed by Mike Nichols and starring Meryl Streep.

Next came the film version of "Heartburn," also with Nichols and Streep; Ephron wrote the screenplay. It took more than five years for Ephron and Bernstein to negotiate the terms of their divorce, and for about half that time the central issue was Bernstein's demand for script approval on "Heartburn," in which he was played by Jack Nicholson. *Harper's* ran an excerpt of a document entitled "Attachment A to the Marital Sepa-



Ephron reveres classic romantic comedies: "Look at Lubitsch. It's so daunting what he did." Photograph by Ruven Afanador.



ration Agreement between Nora Ephron and Carl Bernstein." A pseudonymous column in *Vanity Fair* accused Ephron of "indecent exploitation" for making a record that her children could one day read and watch of their parents' bitter end. ("Here is Carl Bernstein and adultery; there is Nora Ephron and child abuse. It is no contest.") It is difficult to imagine anyone caring much about a pair of divorced journalists now, but theirs was a different era: Carl and Nora were the Brad and Jen of the early eighties.

In the early nineties, Ephron started directing her own movies. Her most successful since "Sleepless" was "You've Got Mail" (1998), another Hanks-Ryan vehicle, loosely based on the Ernst Lubitsch movie "The Shop Around the Corner." In 2006, Ephron managed the almost impossible feat of becoming an It girl yet again, in her sixties. She published the collection "I Feel Bad About My Neck," which became a No. 1 best-seller. Remarkably, she enhanced her own glamour by writing about the distinctly dowdy subject of aging. "When we were young . . . the amount of time we spent making ourselves look good bore some correlation to the number of hours we spent having sex (which was, after all, one of the reasons for our spending so much time on grooming). But now that we're older, whom are we kidding?" The book sold more than a million copies.

"I think people think I am much smarter than I know I am," Ephron said one afternoon over lunch at Payard, on Lexington Avenue. She was wearing sunglasses and sitting in a corner banquette eating a Cobb salad very slowly, in small, tidy bites. "I have a huge number of friends who've managed to change their lives," she continued, "women way more than men. Certainly in part because so many women of my generation are not the main breadwinners, so they have slightly more flexibility. It's sort of the silver lining of things not quite being fair: it's not as big a deal if you say, 'I'm going to take a salary cut and see if I can be something else. A night-club singer.' "

Ephron grew up in Los Angeles, the daughter of two screenwriters. "It was so clear there were no women in show business," she said. "It was so *clearly* not a place for a person like me." Female screenwriters, like Ephron's mother, Phoebe, almost always had a husband they collaborated with, and "woman director" was an oxymoron. Since childhood, Nora Ephron had been "athletic, ambitious, outspoken, competitive," as she has written. But she was also practical. So when she graduated from Wellesley, in 1962, and went to New York City, her fantasies had settled on becoming Dorothy Parker, not Preston Sturges.

Over the years, she has managed to shoot for a bit of both. About half of Ephron's movies have been firmly rejected by both critics and audiences, but the other half have become mainstays of their genre. "We always knew when I was at network television that there are certain movies, no matter if they've been out for a while and people have seen them already or rented the DVD—if it's Valentine's Day and it's on, you're going to watch 'Sleepless in Seattle,' " Ephron's friend Howard Stringer, the chairman and chief executive of Sony Corporation, says. "You're going to watch 'When Harry Met Sally.' " For that, Ephron received an Academy Award nomination for Best Original Screenplay, in 1990. These films—along with "You've Got Mail"—seem to be in a constant loop on TV, and not just in February: you could probably recite whole chunks of them if you tried. They are deeply comforting comedies, and they have made Ephron, at least by some measures, the most successful female director working in this country.

"We don't think of things that way and I'm not," she told me firmly, putting her fork down on the table. "I think Nancy Meyers"—who directed "Something's Got to Give"—"is more successful. But it doesn't matter. The main thing is that it just seems like a sad thing to be called."

Or one could take it as an enormous compliment. "It's a very male business," as Ephron herself put it in "Dreams on Spec," Daniel J. Snyder's documentary about screenwriters breaking into Hollywood. "Vast portions of it . . . might as well be the United States Army in 1943." She continued, "Most directors, I discovered, need to be convinced that the screenplay they're going to direct has something to do with them, and this is a tricky thing if you write screenplays where women have parts that are equal to or greater than the male part. . . . You look at a list of directors and it's all boys; it certainly was when I started as a screenwriter. So I thought, I'm just going to become a director and that'll make it easier."

Ephron detests whining: you can acknowledge a problem, but only in the service of solving it. "Nobody really has an easy time getting a movie made," she said. "And furthermore I can't stand people complaining. So it's not a conversation that interests me, do you know? Those *endless* women-in-film panels. It's, like, just do it! Just *do* it. Write something else if this one didn't get made. It's my ongoing argument with a whole part of the women's movement."

When Ephron finished her salad, she reapplied rose-colored lipstick. She was wearing black pants and a black shirt with a striped scarf, and a Jil Sander jacket, and her makeup and her manicure and her hair were just so. She never does her own hair if she can help it. Instead, twice a week she goes to the beauty parlor to have it washed and blow-dried. "The amount of maintenance involving hair is genuinely overwhelming," she has written. "Sometimes I think that not having to worry about your hair anymore is the secret upside of death."

"But you're so good-looking! I don't know what you're talking about," a woman Nora Ephron had never met before said to her as the two of them stood in front of an avalanche of oysters at the 2009 James Beard Foundation Awards, the Oscars of the food world. It is possible that the woman was thinking of the title or the content of "I Feel Bad About My Neck" when she said that, or she might have been referring to a comment Ephron made earlier in the evening, when she got onstage to introduce a clip of "Julie & Julia" to the culinary establishment. Ephron approached the lectern and said, "I would like to say to whoever is running the camera: just stay back," which made everyone laugh.

There could not have been a better audience for the clip that Ephron showed, of Meryl Streep, as Julia Child, zealously mastering the art of onion chopping. Many of the people present at the Beard Awards had known Child, and they were dazzled by Streep's performance. ("Meryl doesn't do an imitation of Julia Child," Mike Nichols told me. "She *is* Julia Child. Now, we know that's not possible, but we see it.") It was one of the more engaging segments of the ceremony, which dragged on for more than three and a half hours. There were awards for the best graphic design for a restaurant, the best newspaper writing about food without recipes, the best cookbook on a single ingredient (fat), the best new restaurant, the best old restaurant, and so on. Everyone was starving. At what felt like four in the morning, one of the hosts, Stanley Tucci—who plays Julia's husband, Paul Child, in Ephron's film—begged winners to "just say thanks."

The theme of the evening was Women in Food, and the dominant color was pink.

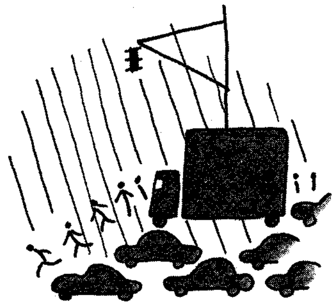
"Isn't this great?" Ephron asked as she made her way to a tasting table where tiny cups of a broth made from coral were being distributed, along with little sea-urchin sandwiches. "I'm going to eat a *lot*."

The restaurateur Drew Nieporent came over, a big bear in a tuxedo. "I can't wait to see the movie!" he said. "I want to do a party for the movie—I will do it wholesale, if you know what I mean. Tell Sir Howard." He meant Howard Stringer, who is, ultimately, the person in charge of all financial decisions at Sony, the distributor of "Julie & Julia."

"Julia Child ate at Nobu once," Nieporent continued. "She's sitting there, she's looking at the sushi, she goes like this"—Nieporent mimed falling asleep in the middle of a sentence, laughed, and walked away.

Ephron moved along, stopping to eat something that looked like a slice of glycerin soap. "It's like grass Jell-O," she said, swallowing a piece of Charlie Trotter's Fava Bean and Onion Surprise, and then made her way upstairs to the V.I.P. dinner.

Ephron was seated next to a man named Len, a Washington lawyer, who said he'd done work for Oprah. "You know, we've had dinner together," he told her.



"Did we date?" Ephron replied.

"No," Len said, and laughed. "In your Carl days. During Bob Woodward's divorce."

"Which one?" Ephron asked, and glanced at her menu. "Oh, my God, this is tragic!" she said, realizing that there would not be any beef marrow on mustard croutons making its way to the table. Stanley Tucci was seated across the table, and she asked him, "Stanley, did you already have the beef marrow downstairs?"

"No. I went with the D'Artagnan lady"—the head of a foie-gras-and-meats company. "I had a piece of her duck sausage," Tucci said. "And then I had a stroke."

Ephron decided that the only thing to do was to go back downstairs. There were more admirers at the marrow table, a pair of food bloggers. "Have you tried the marrow at Minetta Tavern?" she asked them. "It's unbelievable. They serve it with crisp bread and it is just extraordinary."

"Um, I'd need you to get me *into* Minetta Tavern," one replied, which made Ephron smile.

She felt that these particular morsels were not as hot as they ought to be, but still she loaded a napkin with half a dozen of them to bring back to Len and the rest of her tablemates.

"I love you, you're fabulous, I've loved you from the beginning," a woman named Harriet told Ephron before she could make it back. Harriet looked to be in her late sixties. She had a perfect white Louise Brooks bob and she was wearing a low-cut, sequinned Ferragamo outfit. "I listened to the neck book on tape. My daughter was driving back from Madison. I said, 'Go with Nora!' How are your kids? They turned out O.K.?"

"Just great," Ephron said.

"What are you writing now?"

"A play," Ephron told her.

"I'm a divorce lawyer," Harriet said. "Which you know from. Well, you did what you had to do, right?" Harriet thought about it for a second, and then said, with real feeling, "What a shit!"

It has been more than a quarter century since "Heartburn" was published. Despite the fact that Ephron has been married for twenty-two of those years to the writer Nick Pileggi, her third husband, she remains the patron saint of women scorned, the poster girl for divorce. Which is ironic. Because in a Nora Ephron movie it's very easy and painless to break up with someone. In "Sleepless," Meg Ryan's character tells her fiancé, "I can't do this," long after he has had his proposal accepted, met her parents, set a date for the wedding, planned the menu, given her his mother's ring, and picked out china. "Annie, I love you," he replies. "But let's leave that out of this. I don't want to be someone that you're settling for. I don't want to be someone that anyone settles for. Marriage is hard enough without bringing such low expectations into it." People tend not to be quite so reasonable and easygoing when you break their hearts and destroy their dreams. Ephron has acknowledged as much. In the director's commentary for "You've Got Mail," another romantic comedy in which a breakup involves the same level of anguish one generally associates with selecting a flavor of ice cream, Ephron said, "I suppose it's very rare that this happens, that people break up with one another and it's such a relief. But we all like to think it's possible." People need sarcasm, Ephron seems to think, but they also need fairy tales.

Back at the table, two kinds of red wine and four kinds of white had been served. There was Fiore di Nonno burrata on bulgur crackers with artichokes and green olives. There was Bolinas goat tongue with Meyer-lemon-fenugreek-mint-and-tomato chutney. And there were veal cheeks with a spring-vegetable-and-quinoa salad that the New York chef and restaurateur Lidia Bastianich had concocted for the occasion. Ephron told Bastianich, who was also seated at her table, that she went to one of Bastianich's restaurants on her first date with Nick Pileggi. "Good, good," Bastianich said. "And the marriage is O.K.?"

"So far, so good."

In the car ride home, Ephron said she was pleased that she hadn't brought her husband to the Beard Awards. "Nick has some *insane* position about not eating standing up," she said, and started rummaging through the gift bag from the dinner, which included mojito mix and an in-flight menu from Delta, a Beard sponsor.

"Look," she said, pointing at a vibrant picture of airplane food. "This looks so delicious. I think we should go directly to J.F.K."

"I swear to God I'm not doing this to extend my control of this movie," Ephron said one day to Paul Levin, her post-production supervisor. Levin was setting up a clip for her to watch in a midtown screening room.

"I know you're not," Levin said.

"You do not," she said, and Levin laughed.

"Do you want to see the video master?" he asked her.

"How should I know?" Ephron replied, and Levin laughed some more. She was there to see a scene from the beginning of "Julie & Julia" in which Meryl Streep and Stanley Tucci arrive at a restaurant, supposedly in Rouen. Ephron shot it in Paris, and the buildings visible on the way into the restaurant looked too fresh and new, so they had been digitally dirtied up. But it was overdone. "You know, most people are seeing the credits at that moment, and not the too much dirt on the buildings," Ephron said, with a shrug. "But it bothered me."

Levin played the clip and Ephron was pleased with the grime reduction.

"It still looks a little bit like a set," she whispered in the dark. "But that's Paris. What can you do?"

Streep and Tucci were now inside the restaurant, and on the screen was a closeup of the golden sole meunière that Child described in her memoir as "the most exciting meal of my life." Ephron smiled. "That filet of sole is my proudest achievement as a director," she said. "There is nothing I'm more proud of." You could practically smell the butter browning. "I'll tell you one thing," Ephron went on. "Every time I watch this movie, I'm hungry."

Ephron wrote the screenplay based on two books about women and food and marriage: Julia Child's memoir "My Life in France," which traces her evolution from spirited Embassy wife to revered foodie; and the blogger Julie Powell's book about cooking her way through every recipe in Child's "Mastering the Art of French Cooking," in a single year. Powell's blog echoed Ephron's own experience in the kitchen when she was in her twenties, cooking "at least half the recipes in the first Julia," as she has written, and having "imaginary conversations" with Child in the process.

Ephron's alter ego in "Heartburn" is a food writer, and she and her cad of a husband and their best friends have "a friendship that was a shrine to food." There are recipes in "Heartburn" for cheesecake, bread pudding, and bacon hash. The protagonist worries that she has focussed excessive attention on cooking, which is an issue that appears again in "Julie & Julia." ("Too much food, not enough sex," Powell's husband complains in the movie, though all the cooking and eating does not seem to get in the way of Julia and Paul Child's ardor.) "I've written about cooking and marriage dozens of times," Ephron writes in "Heartburn," "and I'm very smart on the subject, I'm very smart about how complicated things get when food and love become hopelessly tangled."

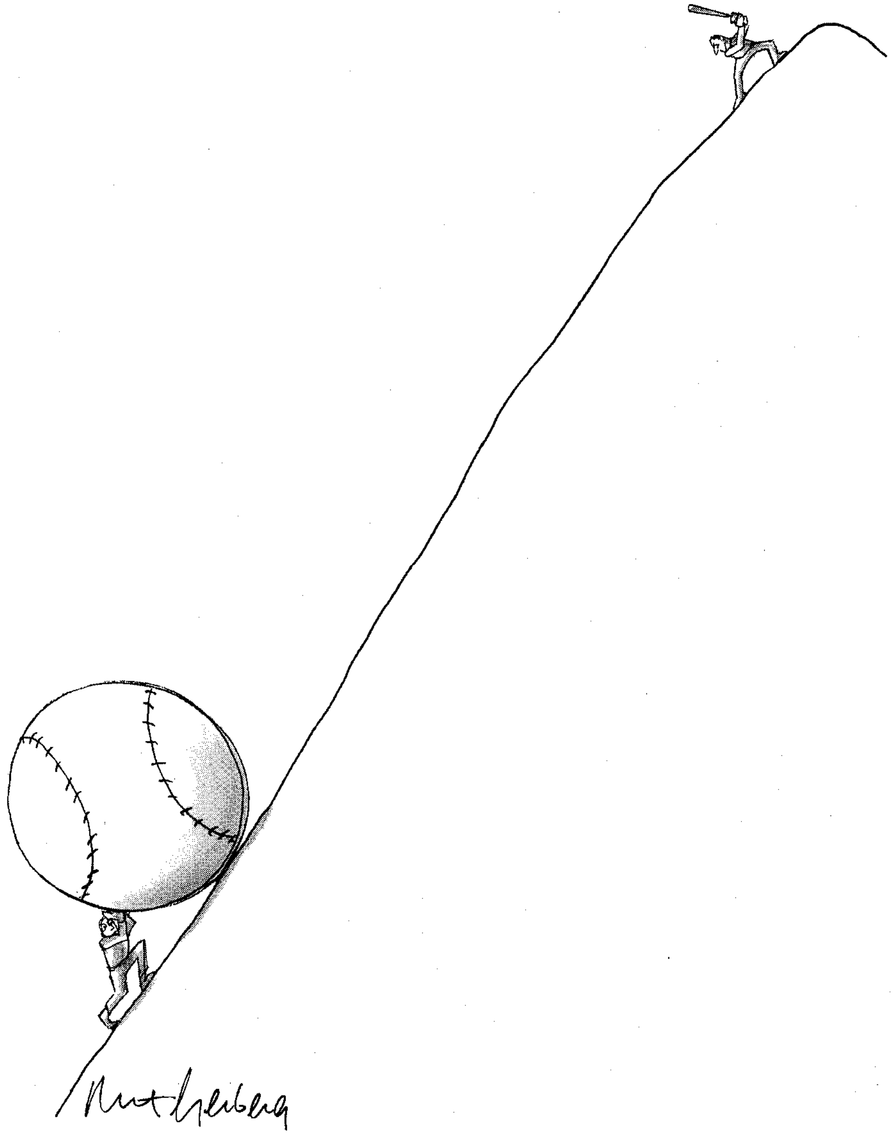
When Ephron knows that she knows something, or knows that she wants something, she does not hesitate to say so. She is like Meg Ryan's character in "When Harry Met Sally." "I just want it the way I want it," Sally tells Harry, about her habit of ordering, say, a piece of apple pie à la mode with the ice cream on the side, strawberry instead of vanilla if it's an option, and, if it's not, then whipped cream, but only if it's real.

To be a director, it is important to know what you want; it is also important to like being in charge. Ephron has never had a problem with either of these things. "There is nothing that she didn't feel was her responsibility to tell me," Delia, the second-oldest of the four Ephron sisters, said. Just after Nora graduated from college and moved to New York City, she fixed Delia up on a date with a reporter she'd met on an assignment for the *Post*. "He told me he met her because there was a murder somewhere, and all the reporters were downstairs arguing about who would get to go up in the elevator first," Delia recalled. "And Nora organized them. She divided them up; she said that the afternoon reporters would go first . . . and you can imagine what this group of reporters was like. And she was just in her twenties."

"The epigraph for this whole thing would be 'Nora Knows What to Do,' " Mike Nichols said. "She can tell you who the doctor is for what you've got. She can tell you when to forget something, let it go. Where the best food is. What the greatest new idea for cooking this or that is. She *knows*." She knows things, and she knows people. Name a famous person. Chances are Ephron used to be her neighbor (Cyndi Lauper). Or interviewed him as an up-and-comer (Bob Dylan). Or went to high school with him (Barry Diller). Or has had him to one of her dinner parties (Carl Sagan). Or dated him (Mort Zuckerman). Or vacations on his yacht (David Geffen). Or has rented her house in East Hampton to her for a reported two hundred thousand dollars a month (Heather Mills, Paul McCartney's ex-wife).

Delia Ephron sounded one cautionary note on the subject of her sister's expertise in all matters, large and small. "Ten per cent of the time, Nora's wrong," she said. "And you never know what the ten per cent is and it's really scary—you know, 'Could this be it?' "

Ephron has made some duds. "Michael," starring John Travolta as a fallen angel who smokes and drinks and hides his enormous feathered wings under a trenchcoat, is tough to get through. "Bewitched," the film she made before "Julie & Julia," starring Will Ferrell as a narcissistic movie star who falls in love with a witch (Nicole Kidman), has some very funny bits. (Stephen Colbert, Steve Carell, and Michael Caine all play supporting roles.) But critics hated it. The *Times* said that Ephron "forgot that a gimmick is no substitute for a screenplay, never mind a real movie." The Washington *Post* called it "dismal." The rap on Ephron from her detractors has always been that her cinematic vision is too schmaltzy, too eager to soothe and please. A line in "Heartburn" anticipates such complaints decades before they were made. "What they say about me," Ephron wrote, is "I don't have an original point of view, and I am a sellout. (This last accusation always makes me cross, because I would love to be a sellout if only someone would ask.)"



Ephron's aspiration is to make something like new old movies. It's not that she's creakily nostalgic; she loves the Internet (she blogs, but she does not Tweet), and made one of the first films starring e-mail. But she has great reverence for the clarity of classic romantic comedies. "You look at Lubitsch, movie after movie after movie," she said, "and you find yourself slowly sinking into your pillow because it's so daunting, what he did. It's like the Olympic dive where they don't do anything at all: they just dive into the water. It looks easier than the one with all the twists. But it's actually not."

It is no small thing to get studio backing after you've lost money on a movie, especially if you are over a certain age. (In Hollywood, that age is approximately twenty-seven.) "It is hard," Ephron said. "I think I've managed it partly because Amy Pascal"—the co-chairman of Sony Pictures—"keeps giving me work." It can't hurt, either, that Pascal's boss is Howard Stringer; Ephron is Stringer's son's godmother. But a writer-director who comes up with something wonderful always has a chance, especially "if, like Nora, you have a long track record of having made money for the company," as Michael Lynton, the chairman and C.E.O. of Sony Pictures, put it. This is the talent that Ephron has always relied upon to resuscitate her, whether from "the catastrophe, the great fiasco, of my second marriage," or from the loss, domestically, of more than twenty million dollars on "Bewitched." "If you're a writer," she said, "you can write your way back."

For a long time, Ephron kept a picture of the mobster John Gotti on her desk, taken during the trial that sent him to prison for the rest of his life. "He was walking out of the courthouse in the most perfect suit, and he looked so great," Ephron told me. To her, it symbolized a spunky defiance that she could appreciate: self-confidence in the face of humiliation and defeat.

Many of Ephron's best friends experience her as impervious to regret or, at least, wildly resilient. "I'll tell you one thing about Nora: she really knows how to pick herself up and turn herself around and start over," Joan Didion, who has been Ephron's close friend for more than four decades, said. "I've never been aware of Nora in a low mood; she doesn't show them." Didion added, "I don't think she gets a lot out of guilt. Whatever secondary gain the rest of us get out of it, Nora doesn't; she just leaves it alone. Isn't that good?"

"One of the things I love about Nora is that she is a force—she's unstoppable," Delia Ephron said. "She was really a well-known journalist and she was really successful at it and a lot of people were jealous of that. And then, lo and behold, Carl, you know, that awful thing happened when she was pregnant, and people thought, Oh, she's just gonna go down. And they were all very excited about it. People do get excited about things like that, especially when it's a woman who's gotten uppity." There is a scene in Delia Ephron's "Hanging Up" in which the two younger sisters gossip with gleeful horror about a rumor that their oldest sister is going to get fired from her job as a magazine editor. Shortly thereafter, the big sister calls to say that she is going to be the editor-in-chief of her own magazine.

"If you want to be successful and you are a woman, you have to understand that there's all kinds of horrible stuff that comes with it, and you simply cannot do anything about it but move on," Ephron told me matter-of-factly one afternoon, sitting on a white Jacquard couch in the living room of her apartment, on the Upper East Side. It is a big place and has a vaguely Parisian feel ("It is a little Froggy in here," she said), with wood panelling in the living room and doors that open out onto a balcony lined with pots of orange nasturtiums. The Chrysler Building punctuates the view and the décor: Ephron and Pileggi have hung old picture postcards of the tower on their walls, and a collection of little crystal and pewter Chrysler Buildings is set up on a silver tray on the coffee table.

I asked Ephron if she had any idea what it's like to feel like a failure. She looked stricken. "God, yes. Are you kidding? Are you *kidding*? Well, *sure*," she said. "Especially with a movie that didn't work, because people sort of follow you into the water and expect that they won't drown. If you are lucky as a director, actors feel very safe with you. And then it turns out they *weren't*. You know, that's terrible. There are probably people who don't feel that, but, oh, my God. Are you kidding me?"

So Ephron has feelings. But she has been working on her John Gotti imitation all her life. Ephron and her sisters were brought up with the knowledge that moaning and complaining were . . . boring. Their parents "simply had no interest whatsoever in your sorrows," Ephron said. Her mother, Phoebe, "might as well have been Ben Bradlee, it was so pull-up-your-socks." (To understand this, all you really need to know about Bradlee, who was the executive editor of the Washington *Post* during the Watergate era, is that Jason Robards played him in "All the President's Men," and that it was very good casting.) "It was so 'Someday this will be a funny story,' " Ephron continued, "so 'I'm not interested. I'm having a drink and smoking a cigarette, and what else is new?' I think if you learn over and over from your parents that you do not get love from wallowing in heartbreak or failure, then you don't really have much of a habit of doing it."

When Nora was a child, the tone in the Ephron household was upbeat; she has said that she feels as if she'd grown up in a sitcom. But with time the environment deteriorated. Henry Ephron, Nora's father, was in and out of mental hospitals in his later years, and attempted suicide. Phoebe Ephron became an alcoholic, and died of cirrhosis, at the age of fifty-seven, in 1971. "But the immediate cause of death was an overdose of sleeping pills administered by my father," Ephron wrote in 2006, in an essay called "The Story of My Life in 3,500 Words or Less." For weeks, while her mother was dwindling in the hospital, her father kept insisting that the doctors "pull the plug." But there was no plug to pull. On the night of her mother's death, Ephron went to her father's apartment after he called her with the news:

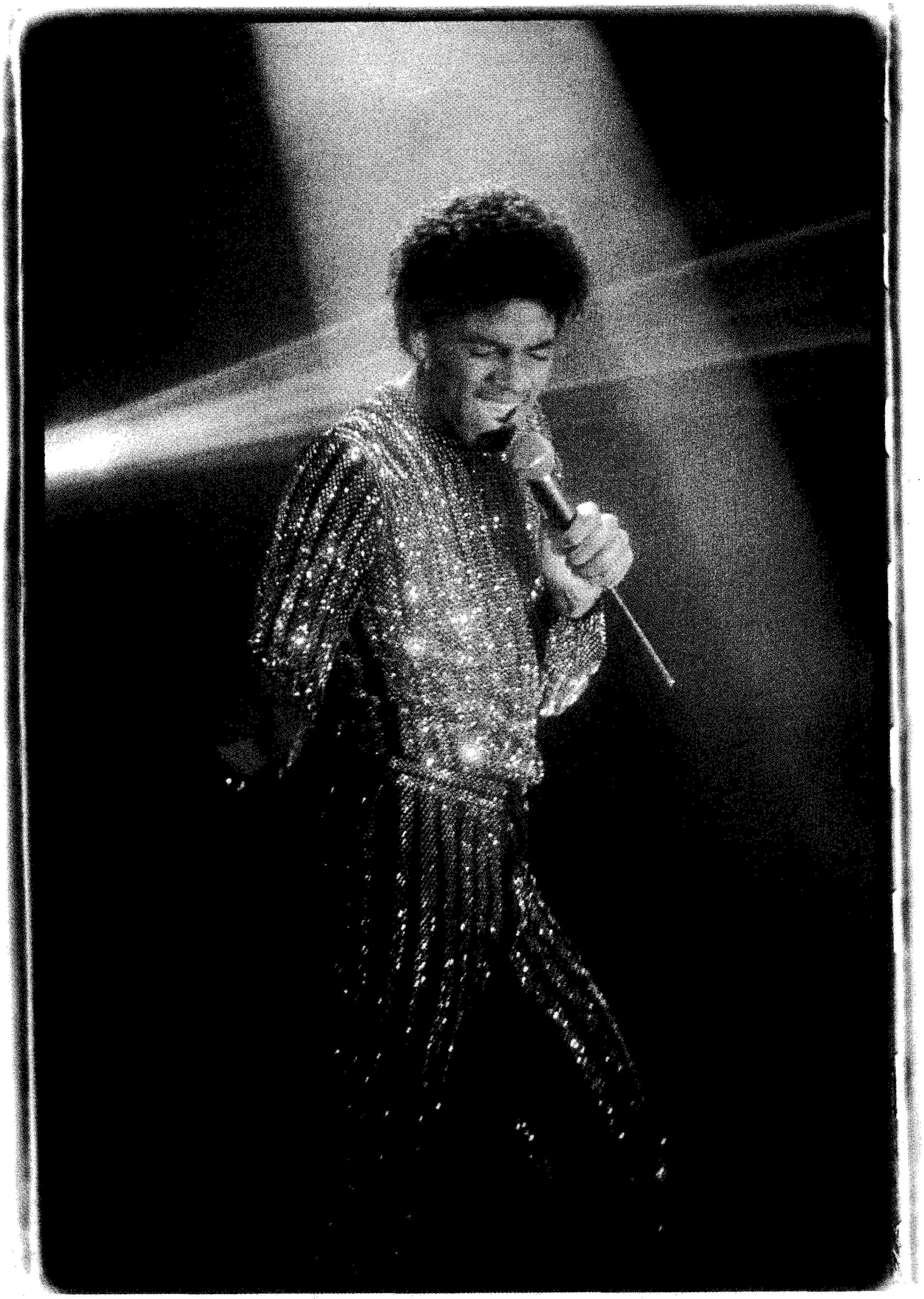
> My father reaches into the pocket of his bathrobe and pulls out a bottle of sleeping pills. "The doctor gave me these in case I was having trouble sleeping," he says. "Flush them down the toilet.". . . The next morning, when my sisters arrive, I tell them about the pills. My sister Amy says to me, "Did you count the pills?"
>
> "No," I say.
>
> "Duh," she says.

I asked Ephron why this incident wasn't a bigger deal. "You mean, was I angry at him for doing that?" she asked. She was not being sarcastic. "At that point, we had all been through real hell with my parents, our parents. And come out the other side." She thought about it for a minute. "I mean, I was upset that my mother had died, don't get me wrong. But she had been dying for a while." She thought about it some more. "And when that happened, I don't know how to say this except . . . it was a moment of almost comic relief. It seemed entirely possible, in character, understandable, and I think we all filed it under Will I Ever Be Able to Use This in Anything?"

This is a family coping mechanism that was explicitly instilled. "Everything is copy," their mother used to say, which was related to her expectation that all suffering be reconfigured into a funny story before it was brought to her attention. "Take notes," she directed Nora, from her deathbed.

"In our family, we were expected to be writers," Delia Ephron told me. "My mother was a working woman when no mothers were—that is the critical thing—and she had this idea that we were the Ephron Sisters. I mean, what is that? It's nuts. But that was what she thought."

Since all four sisters eventually fulfilled their mother's wish and became writers, there is no shortage of literature based on the Ephrons. (Hallie, the second-youngest, writes mysteries that have nothing discernible to do with the family.) Nora's rendition is madcap and bouncy. In most of her writing, life with her parents is depicted as only slightly more unnerving than the version that Henry and Phoebe Ephron presented themselves, in their play "Take Her, She's Mine," which was based on Nora's letters and visits home during her time



SHARE THAT BEAT *Michael Jackson on the set of the music video for "Rock with You," in Los Angeles, 1979. The concept was simple: a few lights, a sparkly suit, and the young star, smiling shyly as he shimmied to the rhythm. Photograph by Kate Simon.*

in college. (It was later made into a movie, starring Jimmy Stewart and Sandra Dee.) The young protagonist is precocious, driven, and irrepressible, as the Ephrons brought up their oldest daughter to be. "Oh, I'm not really marred," she tells them after a bad date. "Takes more than that to mar me. By the time I get back to school I'll reappraise it and it'll be a hilarious story to tell the girls."

Delia's "Hanging Up" is funny, but has a darker cast, dissecting their father's selfishness and irascibility as he, too, descends into alcoholism and, ultimately, dementia at the end of his life. (Delia and Nora wrote a screenplay based on the book, which Diane Keaton made into a movie. The sisters have collaborated on five other scripts, including "You've Got Mail.") And then there is "Cool Shades," the first novel by Amy, the youngest sister. "My parents would argue five nights out of six and I would awake to the smell of scotch and cigarettes and the sound of their screaming," she writes. As a teen-ager, the narrator moves out of her parents' house, as did the author. It is no comedy.

Nora Ephron's parents didn't really come unglued until after she had made it safely to late adolescence. Maybe because of this, or maybe because of her genetic gifts, or for whatever reason, Nora has been the most successful of the sisters at molding their parents' instability into a world of entertaining wackiness. ("I'm very into denial," she told an audience who came for an evening of "Advice for Women" from Ephron and her friend Arianna Huffington a couple of years ago. Everybody clapped.) Her urge to put a happy ending on every story is what her critics dislike and her fans depend upon. And her corresponding refusal to succumb to self-pity is what people envy and resent: it is a quality you don't often see in women, or, for that matter, men.

"I don't mean that you can't have your feelings hurt or that you can't sit at home and feel sorry for yourself—*briefly*," Ephron said that afternoon in her living room as the sun set on the Chrysler Building. "But then I think you have to just start typing and do the next thing." She winced. "I just don't want you to think I'm so bizarrely inhuman that I don't have moments of thinking, Oh, God, that didn't work and I feel horrible about it. If my friends don't know that I feel that, then either they have no imagination or I've been really good at being John Gotti."

Ephron used to make a lot of jokes about men not being able to keep it in their pants. In "Heartburn," she wrote that Mark Feldman, the character based on Carl Bernstein, "was capable of having sex with a venetian blind." In "Mixed Nuts," a shrill character (played by Madeline Kahn) says, "Men could have sex with a tree." But that was then. The men in "Julie & Julia" are nearly flawless. There is a scene in the film in which Julie Powell has a fight with her husband because he is sick of her calling him "a saint" on her blog.

Ephron has a different point of reference now. She is the mother of two grown sons and the wife of Nick Pileggi, "a famously nice guy," as she has put it. "It's interesting when you have boys," she said. "Because boys are so sweet. Little boys, they are just great, and it was completely fascinating to me to see that. But the problem with men is not whether they're nice or not. It's that it's hard for them at a certain point in their lives to stay true. It just is. It's almost not their fault. But it feels like it's their fault if you are involved with any of them. And then you get older and almost all the men I know just seem as sweet as the boys I once had."

When Ephron and Pileggi started dating, he "instantly caught pinkeye" from her children, who were three and four at the time. Within a month, he had moved into her apartment, on the West Side, "and that was just that," she said. They have been together for twenty-six years. "I have never, ever seen them have a fight," Ephron's son Jacob Bernstein, who writes for *Women's Wear Daily*, said.

Pileggi is "not the difficult person in the marriage," Ephron said. "Although he is the crazy person! No one knows that, everybody thinks I'm the crazy person, but he's the crazy person. But he will just laugh if you say it to him."

When Nick Pileggi got home, he was in a good mood, as usual. He is very calm, very charming and wears his hair in a modified Benjamin Franklin: sparse on top, long behind the ears. He is the author of the book "Wiseguy," which Martin Scorsese made into the film "Goodfellas," in 1990. Pileggi has been working in films as a writer and producer ever since.

Pileggi's first marriage ended about the same time that Ephron and Bernstein broke up. "I think when we got married we were both nervous. We were young and it was—"

"Young?" Ephron shrieked. "We were so not young!" (She was forty-six and he was fifty-four.)

"I thought of myself as young at the time."

"Young*er*," Ephron said.

They sat down to dinner at the round marble table in their dining room. Ephron had made some excellent shrimp sautéed in butter and Cajun spices from a recipe by Paul Prudhomme, which she served with Provençal tomatoes and crispy rice baked in a copper casserole.

"This is good, isn't it?" she said. "A big mess of tastes! I'm not a serious cook—I'm a feeder."

"You like to cook so that people will sit at a table and you can bring out all these things and everybody can talk," Pileggi said. "I mean, no better day does Nora have than you get up at eight in the morning and you start getting ready to do things—"

"My only regret—well, no, it's not my only regret about our wedding—"

"And she still talks about it!"

"Well, my wedding dress. Just this appalling dress. And I looked terrible in it. It looked like '101 Dalmatians.' I don't know what I was thinking or who I thought I was. But the worst thing was that everyone said I couldn't cook because it was my wedding."

"And to be getting married that day *and* cook," Pileggi said, between shrimps.

"It was too . . . the sort of thing I might do," Ephron said. "So we had a caterer—I think it's practically the only time in our life. And I had *nothing* to *do* all day. I had no idea what I was supposed to do."

They invited about forty guests to a dinner party and then surprised them by getting married at it. "You could have easily done it," Pileggi said. "Though I think I was against it at the time."

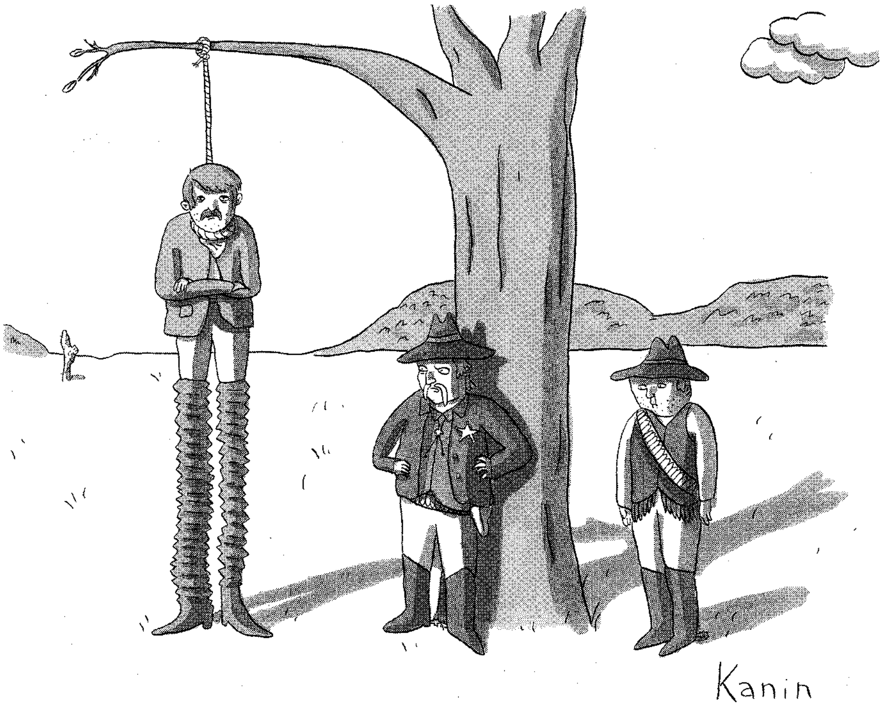
"Yes, you were," his wife said.

"I just thought, You're getting married on that day, do you really want to be in the kitchen cooking stuff while you're getting dressed and the guests are coming and you don't know what other stuff is going to come up that you don't know about?"

"*Anyway*," Ephron said.

There is a restaurant in Washington, D.C., called Nora, which was very popular while Ephron was married to Bernstein, and she still gets worked up remembering her friends' being fed by another Nora. "People would say, 'Let's go to Nora's,' and I could not stand it—I could not stand it!" Ephron said, silently banging her skinny fist on the table. "I always used to say it was one of the reasons I had to leave Washington. Because I was so used to being—"

"The only Nora," Pileggi finished, beaming.



"Well, I'll be danged—he's got accordion boots."

When Julia Child moved to France, in 1948, she was not the Julia Child that Nora Ephron or, later, Julie Powell fell in love with and took on as a culinary guardian angel. She was the daughter of the "staunchly conservative" John McWilliams, who had hoped that she would "settle in Pasadena to live a conventional life," she wrote. "Instead, I had married Paul Child, a painter, photographer, poet, and mid-level diplomat who had taken me to live in dirty, dreaded France. I couldn't have been happier!" The Childs took a rambling apartment on the Rue de l'Université—which they dubbed Rue de Loo—and, as Paul Child worked on exhibitions at the Embassy, Julia hosted glamorous cocktail parties. They socialized with John Kenneth Galbraith, Ernest Hemingway's ex-wife Hadley, and Alice B. Toklas. They ate in grand restaurants and poky cafés, where "my tastes were growing bolder," Child wrote. "I had never thought of eating a *snail* before, but, my, tender escargots bobbing in garlicky butter were one of my happiest discoveries!"

Despite being "giddy" about living in Paris, Child was unsatisfied. "I *wanted* to look chic and Parisian, but with my big bones and long feet, I did not fit most French clothes," Child wrote. She tried to read "Serious News Articles," though she worried that her "sievelike mind didn't want to lock away dates and details; it wanted to float and meander." There is a scene in Ephron's movie in which the Childs are having dinner at a glowing Paris bistro and Julia asks her husband, "What should I *do*, do you think?"

"About what?" he replies.

"All the wives here don't *do* anything. That's just not me."

What Child did, of course, was learn to cook, at Le Cordon Bleu, where her romance with food and France deepened into true love. Child's memoir and Ephron's film celebrate not just the thrilling life of Julia Child, with its remarkable adventures and success, but the pleasure of finding the thing you are best at, and devoting yourself to it with abandon. If you make a mistake, learn from it, then forget it. "I don't believe in twisting yourself into knots of excuses and explanations over the food you make," Child wrote. "Maybe the cat has fallen into the stew, or the lettuce has frozen, or the cake has collapsed—*eh bien, tant pis!*"

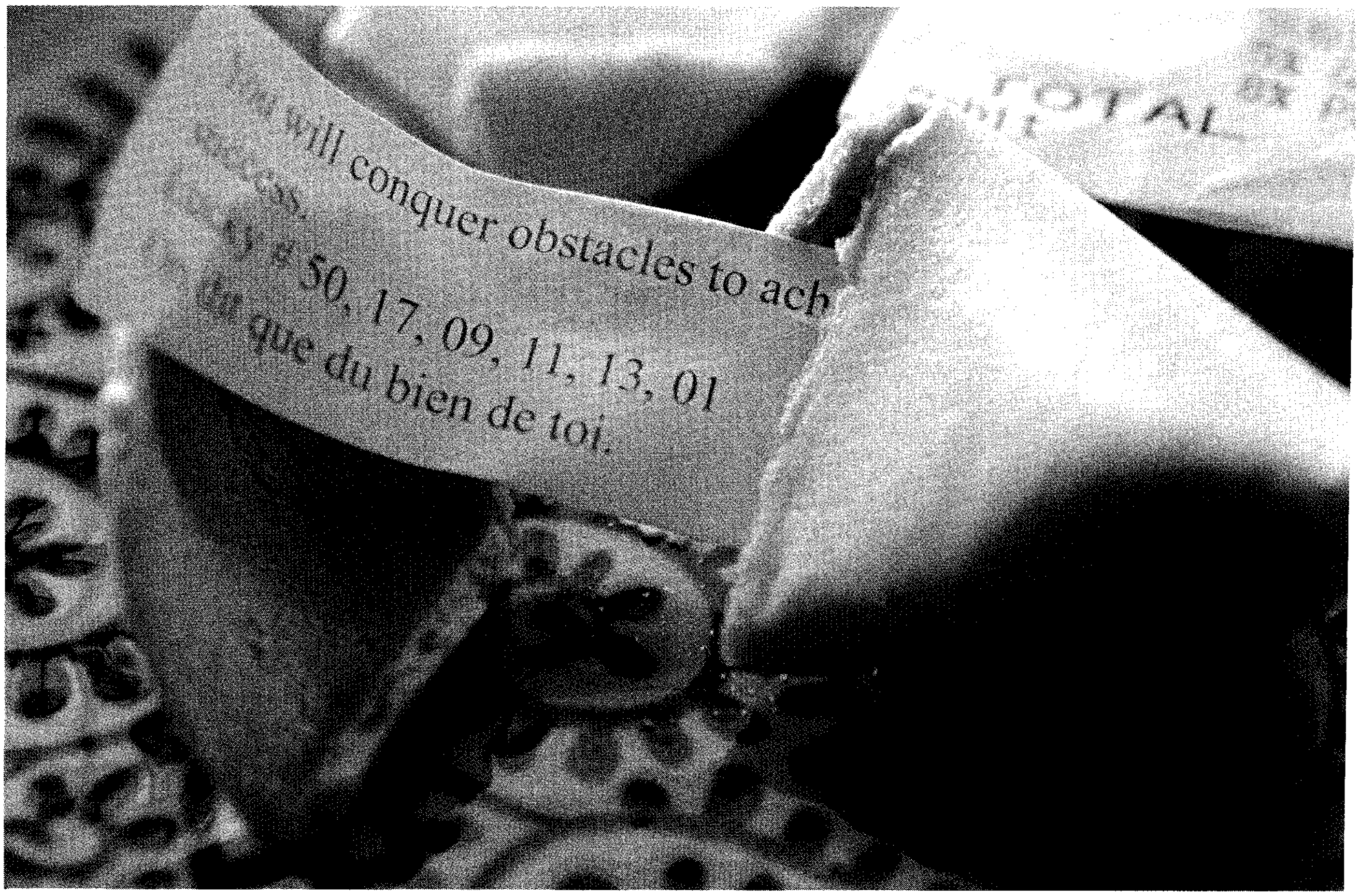
Don't complain, don't explain: that is the motto of Julia Child and Nora Ephron, two women who love butter and making dinner for their husbands. "You never get to see that on the screen," Meryl Streep said. "Because drama is conflict. So we only see the bad stuff. But we're all sustained by good marriages, to the extent that we are."

I feel bad about what I'm going to do here. But the truth is, "Julie & Julia" is not a fair fight. For half the film, we are in *Paris* with *Julia Child* played by *Meryl Streep*. It is pretty transcendent. For the other half, we are stuck in Long Island City, Queens, with the "lowly cubicle worker" Julie Powell, a character who is immature, self-pitying, and frazzled (which is to say, an average human being). Powell is played by Amy Adams, who is a talented actress, but she is up against the queen herself. When Adams, as Julie, is on the screen, it necessarily means that Streep, as Julia, is not, and you come to resent her for this.

It is possible that the film would not have worked if it were simply a bio-pic of Julia Child—that it derives its narrative thrust and commercial potential from the interplay between a young woman idolizing and relying upon Child in the more or less present and the splendid story of Julia Child's past. Perhaps Child is able to emerge from this film as an almost mythical creature because she is presented in contrast to a mere mortal.

But there may be another reason the Julia Child portions of "Julie & Julia" are so irresistibly vivid and the Julie Powell bits feel a little flat. It is possible that Nora Ephron no longer understands half as well what it's like to be ordinary as she understands being remarkable.

How would she? ♦



FICTION

CHILDCARE

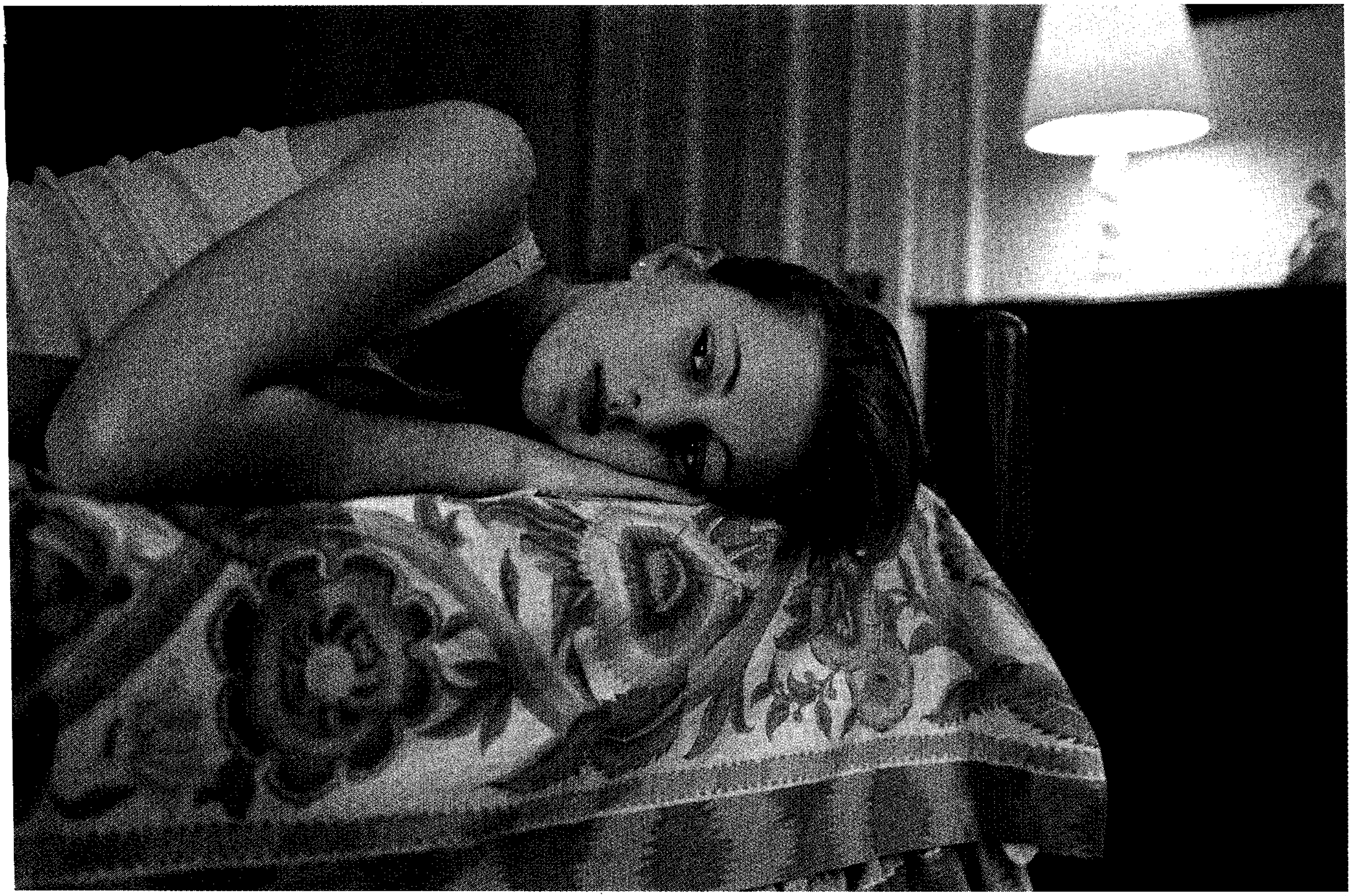
BY LORRIE MOORE

The cold came late that fall, and the songbirds were caught off guard. By the time the snow and wind began in earnest, too many had been suckered into staying, and instead of flying south, instead of already having flown south, they were huddled in people's yards, their feathers puffed for some modicum of warmth. I was looking for a babysitting job. I was a student and needed money, so I would walk from interview to interview in these attractive but wintry neighborhoods, past the eerie multitudes of robins pecking at the frozen ground, dun gray and stricken—though what bird in the best of circumstances does not look a little stricken—until at last, late in my search, at the end of a week, startlingly, the birds had disappeared. I did not want to think about what had happened to them. Or, rather, that is an expression—of politeness, a false promise of delicacy—for in fact I wondered about them all the time: imagining them dead, in stunning heaps in some killing cornfield outside of town, or dropped from the sky in twos and threes for miles down along the Illinois state line.

I was looking in December for work that would begin in January, at the start of the spring term. I'd finished my exams and was answering ads from the student job board, ones for "childcare provider." I liked children—I did!—or, rather, I liked them O.K. They were sometimes interesting. I admired their stamina and candor. And I was good with them, in that I could make funny faces at the babies and teach the older children card tricks while speaking in the theatrically sarcastic tones that disarmed and enthralled them. But I was not especially skilled at minding children for long spells; I grew bored, perhaps like my own mother. After I'd spent too much time playing their games, my mind grew peckish and longed to lose itself in some book I had in my backpack. I was ever hopeful of early bedtimes and long naps.

I had come from Dellacrosse Central, from a small farm on the old Perryville Road, to this university town of Troy, "the Athens of the Midwest," as if from a cave—like the priest-child of a Colombian tribe I'd read about in Anthropology 203, a boy made mystical by being kept in the dark for the bulk of his childhood and allowed only stories—no experience—of the outside world. Once brought out into light, he was in a per-

LEFT: RADIUS IMAGES/CORBIS; RIGHT: BLAKE FITCH/CLAMPART, NY



petual, holy condition of bedazzlement and wonder; no story could ever equal the thing itself. And so it was with me. Nothing had really prepared me. Not the college piggy bank in the dining room, the savings bonds from my grandparents, or the used set of World Book encyclopedias, with their beautiful color charts of international wheat production and photographs of Presidential birthplaces. The flat, green world of my parents' hogless, horseless farm—its dullness, its flies, its quiet ripped open daily by the fumes and whining of machinery—twisted away and left me with a brilliant city life of books and films and witty friends. Someone had turned on the lights. Someone had led me out of the cave of Perryville Road. My brain was on fire with Chaucer, Sylvia Plath, Simone de Beauvoir. Twice a week, a young professor named Thad, dressed in jeans and a tie, stood before a lecture hall of stunned farm kids like me and spoke thrillingly of Henry James's masturbation of the comma. I was riveted. I had never before seen a man wear jeans with a tie. The Colombian cave, of course, had produced a mystic; my childhood, however, had produced only me. In the corridors, students argued over Bach, Beck, Balkanization, bacterial warfare. Out-of-state kids said things to me like "You're from the country. Is it true that if you eat a bear's liver you'll die?" They asked, "Ever know someone who did you-know-what with a cow?" Or "Is it an actual fact that pigs won't eat bananas?" What I did know was that a goat would not really eat a tin can: it just liked to lick the paste on the label. But no one ever asked me about that.

Before coming to Troy, I had never had Chinese food. But now, two blocks from my apartment, next to a shoe-repair shop, was a place called the Peking Café, where I went as often as I could for the Buddha's Delight. These odd Chinese vegetables—fungal and gnomic in their brown sauce—had for me the power of an adventure or a rite, a statement to be savored. Back in Dellacrosse, the dining was divided into "casual," which meant that you ate it standing up or took it away, and the high end, which was called "sit-down dining." At the Wie Haus Family Restaurant, where we went for sit-down, the seats were red leatherette and the walls were gemütlich and panelled, decorated with framed deep kitsch—wide-eyed shepherdesses and jesters. The breakfast menus said "Guten Morgen." Sauces were called "gravy." And the dinner menu featured cheese-curd meat loaf and steak "cooked to your likeness." On Fridays, there were fish fries or boils, at which they served "lawyers" (burbot or eelpout), so called because their hearts were in their butts. On Sundays, there was not only marshmallow-and-maraschino-cherry salad and something called Grandma Jell-O but "prime rib with *au jus*," a precise knowledge of French—or English or even food coloring—not being the restaurant's strong suit. "À la carte" meant soup or salad; "dinner" meant soup and salad. The Roquefort on the salad was called by the waitstaff "Rockford dressing." The house wines—red, white, or pink—bore the requisite bouquets of rose, soap, and graphite, a whiff of hay, a hint of Hooterville, though the menu remained mute about all this, sticking to straightforward declarations of hue. Light ale and dunkel were served. For dessert, there was usually a *Glückschmerz* pie, with the fluffy look and heft of a small snowbank. After any meal, sleepiness ensued.

Now, however, away and on my own,

seduced and salted by brown sauce, I felt myself thinning and alive. The owners of the Peking Café let me linger over my books and stay as long as I wanted to: "Take your tie! No lush!" they said kindly as they sprayed the neighboring tables with disinfectant. I ate mango and papaya, nudging the stringy parts out of my teeth with a cinnamon toothpick. I had a handleless cup of hot, stale tea, poured and reheated from a pail stored in the restaurant's walk-in refrigerator, and one elegantly folded fortune cookie—a short paper nerve baked in an ear. I would tug the paper slip from the stiff clutches of the cookie and save it as a bookmark. All my books had fortunes protruding like tiny tails from their pages: *You are the crispy noodle in the salad of life. You are the master of your own destiny.* My roommate, Murph—a nose-pierced, hinky-toothed blonde from Dubuque, who used black soap and black dental floss and whose quick opinions were impressively harsh (she pronounced Dubuque "Du-ba-cue")—always added the phrase "in bed" to any fortune-cookie fortune, so in my mind I read them that way, too: *You are the master of your own destiny. In bed.* Well, that was true. *Debt is a seductive liar. In bed.* Or, the less well translated, *Your fate will blossom like a bloom.* Or the sly, wise guy: *A refreshing change is in your future.* Sometimes, as a better joke, I added, *though not in bed. You will soon make money.* Or: *Wealth is a wise woman's man. Though not in bed.*

I looked daily at the employment listings. Childcare was in demand: I turned in my final papers and answered the ads. One fortyish pregnant woman after another hung up my coat, sat me in her living room, then waddled out to the kitchen, got my tea, and waddled back in, clutching her back, slopping tea onto the saucer, and asking me questions. "What would you do if our little baby started crying and wouldn't stop?" "Are you available evenings?" "What do you think of as a useful educational activity for a small child?" I had no idea. I had never seen so many pregnant women in such a short period of time—five in all. It alarmed me. They did not look radiant. They looked reddened with high blood pressure and frightened. I gave them my references and a written summary of my experience. My experience was not all that much—just the Pitskys and the Schultzes back home. I had once, as part of a class project on human reproduction, carried around for an entire week a sack of flour the exact weight and feel of an infant. I'd swaddled it and cuddled it and placed it in safe, cushioned places for naps. But once, when no one was looking, I stuffed it into my backpack with a lot of sharp pens, and it got stabbed. My books, powdery white the rest of the term, became a joke in the class. I left this off my résumé. But the rest I'd typed up. To gild the lily-livered, as my dad sometimes said, I wore to my interviews what the department stores called "a career jacket," and perhaps the women liked the professionalism of that. They were professionals themselves. Two were lawyers, one was a journalist, one was a doctor, one a high-school teacher. Where were the husbands? "Oh, at work," the women said vaguely. All except the journalist, who said, "Good question!"

The last house I went to was a gray stucco prairie house with a chimney cloaked in dead ivy. Some desiccated mums were still in pots on the porch. Ice frosted the crisp heads of the flowers. Leaning against the house were a shovel and a rake, and tucked into a corner of the porch were two phone books still in shrink-wrap. The woman of the house opened the door. She was pale and compact, no sags or pouches, linen skin tight across the bone. The hollows of her cheeks were powdered darkly, as if with the pollen of a tiger lily. Her hair was cropped short and dyed the fashionable bright auburn of a ladybug. Her earrings were buttons of deepest orange, her leggings mahogany, her sweater rust-colored, and her lips a maroonish brown. She looked like a highly controlled oxidation experiment. "Come in," she said, and I entered, mutely at first and then, as always, apologetically, as if I were late, though I wasn't.

The woman closed the heavy oak door behind me, and I stamped my feet on the braided rug I was standing on, to shake off the snow. I started to take off my shoes. "Oh, you don't have to take off your shoes," she said. "There's too much of that prissy Japanese stuff going on in this town. Bring in the mud." She smiled—big, theatrical, a little crazy. I had forgotten her name and was hoping she'd say it soon; if she didn't, she might not say it at all.

"I'm Tassie Keltjin," I said, thrusting out my hand. She took it and then studied my face. "Yes," she said absently, unnervingly scrutinizing each of my eyes. Her gaze made a slow, observing circle around my nose and mouth. "I'm Sarah Brink," she said finally. I was not used to being looked at close up, not used to the thing I was looking at looking back. Certainly my own mother had never done such looking, and in general my face had the kind of smooth, round stupidity that did not prompt the world's study. I had always felt as hidden as the hull in a berry, as secret and fetal as the curled fortune in a cookie, and such hiddenness was not without its advantages, its egotisms, its grief-fed grandiosities. "Here, let me take your coat," Sarah Brink said finally, and only then, as she lifted it off me and headed across the foyer to hang it on a hat rack, did I notice that she was as thin as a pin, not pregnant at all.

She led me into the living room, stopping at the large back window first. I followed her, tried to do what she did. In the yard, most of a sizable oak tree split by lightning had been hacked and stacked by the garage for winter firewood. Near its old stump, another tree—tenuous, young, with the look of a swizzle stick—had been planted, trussed, and braced. But Sarah wasn't studying the trees. "Oh, for the love of God, look at those poor dogs," she said. We stood there, watching. The dogs next door were being kept in their yard by an invisible electric fence. One of them, a German shepherd, understood the fence, but the other one, a little terrier, did not. The German shepherd would get a game of chase going around the yard and lead the terrier right to the electrified border and then stop short, leaving the terrier to barrel on ahead into the electricity. The stunned terrier would then come racing back, shrieking with pain. "This has been going on for weeks," Sarah said.

"Reminds me of dating," I said, and Sarah spun her head around, to size me up again. Heat flew to my face. Dating? What did I know of it? My roommate, Murph, had done all the dating and had essentially abandoned me so that she could now sleep every night with this new guy she'd met. She had bequeathed me her vibrator, a strange swirling, buzzing thing that when switched to "High" gyrated in the air like someone's bored thick finger going whoop-de-do. Whose penis could this possibly resemble? Someone who had worked in a circus, perhaps. Maybe Burt Lancaster's in "Trapeze." I kept the thing on the kitchen counter, where Murph had left it for me, and occasionally I used it to stir my chocolate milk.

Sarah turned back to the window. "The neighbors just put in that invisible fence," she said. "In November. I'm sure it causes M.S. or something."

Then she got down to business. "Have a seat. Here's the deal." She motioned with an arm tossed suddenly out in a spasm. "Childcare," she began, but then stopped, as if that were sufficient.

I sat down on a chair that was upholstered in a kind of pillow ticking. "Childcare," like "healthcare," had become one word. I was about to become a dispenser of it. I opened my backpack and began fumbling through it, looking for a copy of my résumé. Sarah sat across from me on a pale-gray sofa, the very brightness of her looking as if it might stain the cushions. She twisted her legs up and around each other in such a way that the lower half of one gave the illusion of jutting out of the upper half of the other, as if she had the backward knees of a crane. She began clearing her throat, so I stopped fumbling and set the backpack aside. "Already the winter air is getting to me," she said. She turned and coughed again loudly, in that parched fashion that doctors call "unproductive." She patted her flat stomach. "Here's the deal," she said again. "We are adopting."

"Adopting?"

"A baby. We are adopting a baby. That's why we're advertising for a sitter. We'd like to line someone up ahead of time for some regular hours."

I didn't know anything about adoption. I'd known only one adopted girl when I was growing up, Becky Sussluch, who at sixteen was spoiled and beautiful and having an affair with a mussed and handsome student teacher whom I myself had a crush on. In general, I thought of adoption much as I thought of most things in life: uneasily. Adoption seemed both a cruel joke and a lovely daydream—a nice way of avoiding the blood and pain of giving birth, or, from a child's perspective, a realized fantasy of your parents not really being your parents. Your genes could thrust one arm in the air and pump up and down. Yes! You were not actually related to *them!*

"Congratulations," I murmured now to Sarah. Was that what one said?

Sarah's face lit up gratefully, as if no one had yet said an encouraging word to her on the matter. "Why, thank you! I have so much work at the restaurant that everyone I mention this to acts peculiar and quiet, so meanly worried for me. They say, 'Really!' and then all this tension springs to their mouths. They think I'm too old."

I accidentally nodded. I had no idea, conversationally, where we were. I searched, as I too often found myself having to do, to find a language, or even an octave, in which to speak. I wondered how old she was.

"I own Petit Moulin," Sarah Brink added.

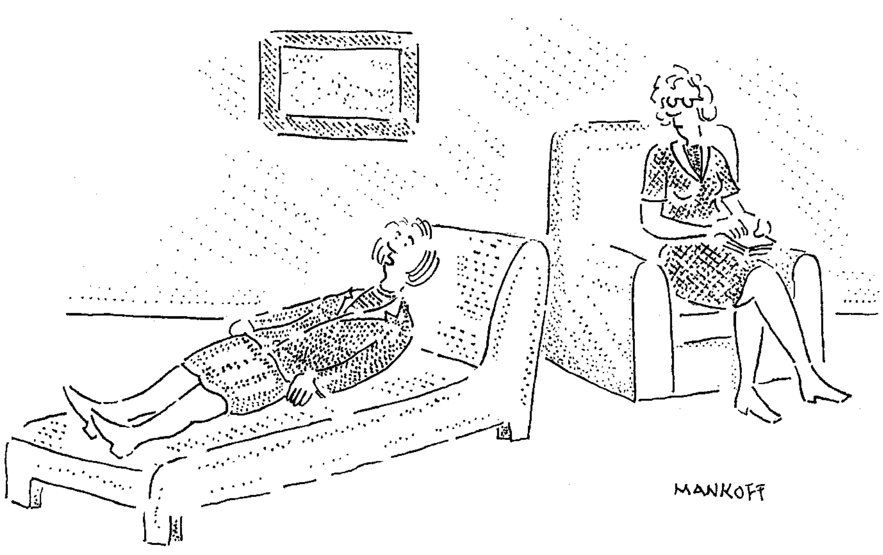
Petit Moulin. I knew of it. It was one of those expensive restaurants downtown, every entrée freshly hairy with dill, every soup and dessert dripped upon as preciously as a Pollock, fillets and cutlets sprinkled with lavender dust once owned by pixies—restaurants to which students never went, unless newly pinned to a fraternity boy or dating an assistant dean or hosting a visit from concerned suburban parents. I knew that Petit Moulin served things that sounded like instruments—timbales, quenelles. God only knew what they were. I had once tried to study the menu in its lit case near the entrance, and as I stared at the words the sting of my own exile had moistened my eyes. The lowest price for an entrée was twenty-two dollars, the highest, forty-five. Forty-five! You could get a Taiwanese oil-and-water bra for that price!

I fumbled in my bag again for my résumé, and found it folded and bent but handed it to Sarah anyway. I spoke. "My father supplied a few of the restaurants around here. A few years back it was, I think."

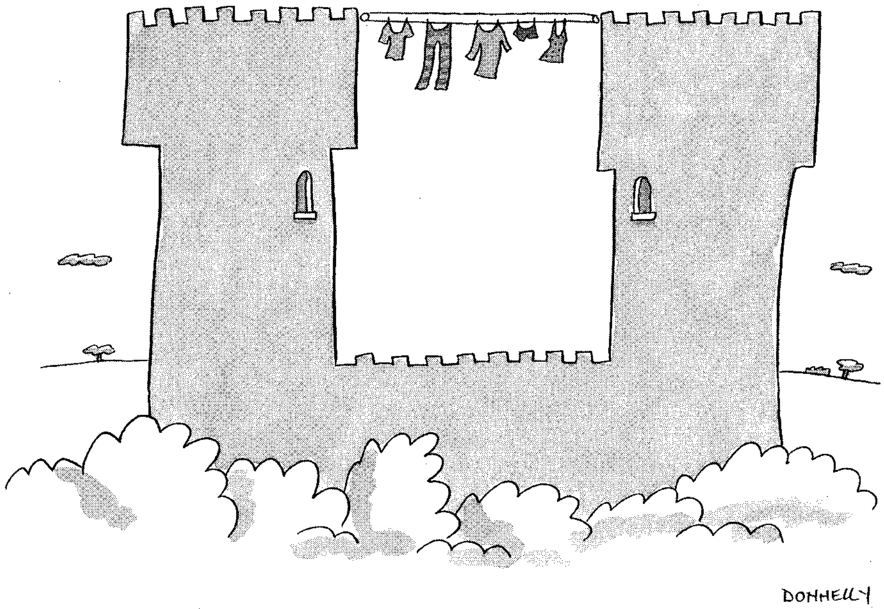
Sarah Brink looked at my résumé. "Are you related to Bo Keltjin—Keltjin potatoes?"

It startled me to hear my father's potatoes—Kennebecs, Norlands, Pontiacs, Yukon golds, some the size of marbles, some grapefruits, depending on drought and digging times and what the beetles were up to—summed up and referred to that way right here in her living room. "That's my dad," I said.

"Why, I remember your father very well. His Klamath pearls were famous. Also the yellow fingerlings. And his purple Peruvians and Rose Finns were the first to be sold in those little netted berry pints, like jewels. I'd rush out to the farmers' market at 6 A.M. to get them. Come April, I should put those back on the menu." She was getting dreamy. Still, it was nice to hear my father spoken well of. He was not really respected as a farmer back home: he was a hobbyist, a truck farmer, with no real acreage, just some ducks (that every fall raped one another in



"Oh, my husband's fine in bed as long as he stays on his side."



a brutal fashion we never got used to), a dog, a tractor, a Web site (a Web site, for Christ's sake!), and two decorative, brockle-headed cows of dubious dairiness. We had also once had an ebullient pig named Helen, who would come when you called her name and smiled like a dolphin when you spoke to her. And then we didn't see her for a few days, and one morning over bacon and eggs my brother said, "Is this Helen?" and I dropped my fork and said, "This is Helen? Is this Helen?!" The next pig we got we never met, and its name was No. WK3746.

"Yeah, his potatoes have a rep—at least in certain places," I hastened to add. "Even my mother admires them, and she's hard to please. She used to call them *pommes de terre de l'air*."

"That's funny," Sarah said.

I feared that Sarah was one of those women who, instead of laughing, said, "That's funny," or, instead of smiling, said, "That's interesting," or instead of saying, "You are a stupid blithering idiot," said, "Well, I think it's a little more complicated than that." I never knew what to do around such people, especially the ones who, after you spoke, liked to say, enigmatically, "I see." Usually I just went mute.

"Potatoes are grown from the eyes of other potatoes," I said, apropos of God knows what.

"Yes." Sarah looked at me searchingly. "Your father seemed like a nice man. How old is he now?"

"Forty-five."

"Forty-five! Why, I'm forty-five. That means I'm old enough to be your . . ." She took a breath, still processing her own amazement.

"To be my dad?" I said.

Sarah Brink laughed, a quasi-laugh, a socially constructed laugh—a collection of predetermined notes, like the chimes of a doorbell.

"So here's the job description," she said when the laugh was through.

Walking home, I tried to remember everything that Sarah Brink had said to me. It was a mile back to my apartment, so I replayed long snippets of her voice, though the cold air was the sort that bullied a walker into mental muteness. *This is an incredibly important position for us, even if we are hiring at the last minute. If we hire you, we would like you to be there with us for everything, from the very first day. We would like you to feel like part of our family, since, of course, you* will *be part of it.*

I tried to think who Sarah Brink reminded me of, though I was sure it wasn't anyone I'd actually met. Probably she reminded me of a character from a television show I'd watched years before. But not the star. Definitely not the star. More like the star's neatnik roommate or the star's kooky cousin from Cleveland. I knew that, even once she had a baby, she would never be able to shake the Auntie Mame quality from her mothering. There were worse things, I supposed.

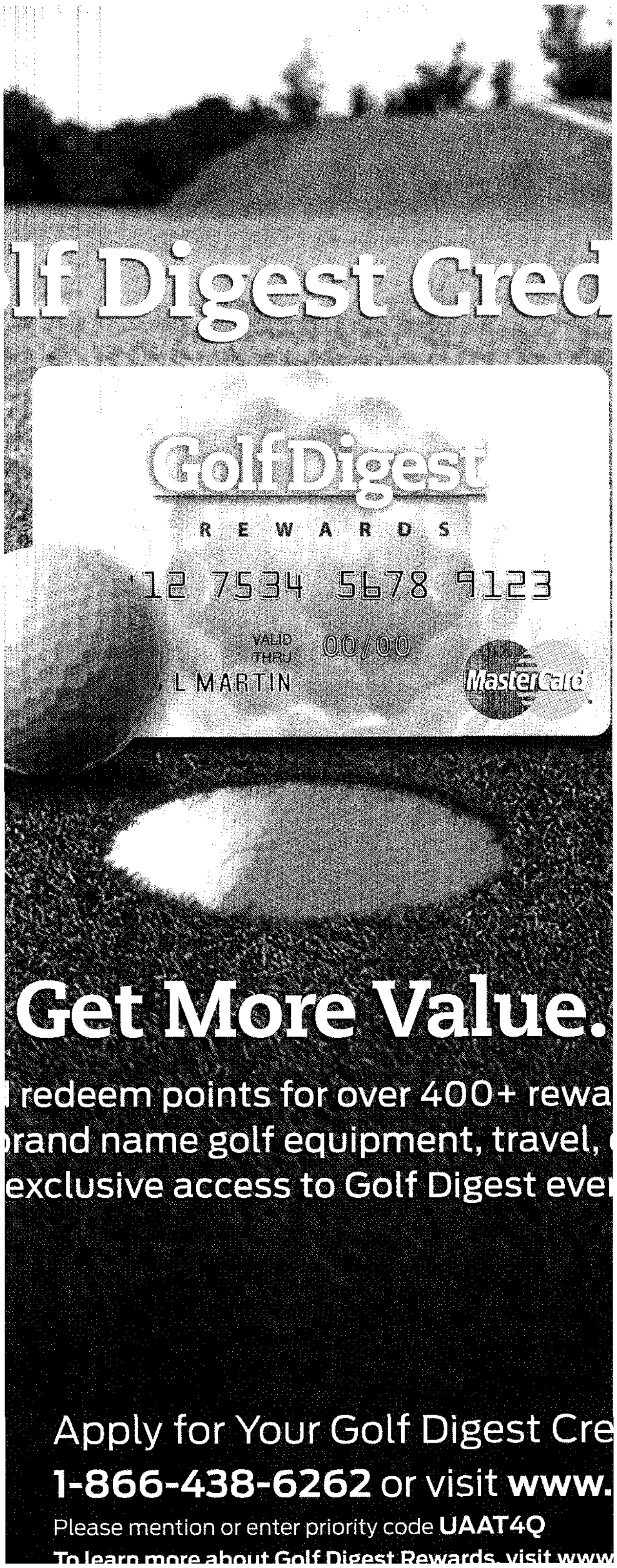
My apartment was in one of those old frame houses close to campus, in the student ghetto that abutted the university stadium. Across the street, the gray concrete stadium wall rose three times higher than any building around, and overshadowed the neighborhood in a bleak and brutal way. In spring and fall, convening marching bands, with their vibrating tubas and snares, routinely rattled our windowpanes. On Sunday mornings, after the game, the sidewalk was littered with cardboard signs that read, "I Need Tickets."

In the hallway of my apartment, the phone-machine light was blinking and I pressed Play, turned up the volume, then went on into my bedroom, where I flopped down on my bed, in the Icelandic afternoon dusk, door open, to listen. A long, uncertain silence preceded the message. "Yes, hello, this is Sarah Brink phoning for Tassie Keltjin." There was another long, uncertain silence. I sat straight up to hear if there was anything else. "Could she phone me back sometime this evening? Thank you very much."

I got up and rewound the machine and played the message from Sarah Brink again. What was I frightened of? I wasn't sure. But I decided to wait until the morning to phone her back. I got into my nightgown, made a grilled-cheese sandwich and some mint tea, then took them back into my room, where I consumed them in bed. Ringed by crumbs and grease, newspapers and a book, I fell asleep.

I woke up in a blaze of white sun. I had neglected to pull down the shades and it had snowed during the night; the morning rays reflected off the snow on the sills and on the low adjacent roof, setting the room on fire with daylight. I tried not to think about my life. I did not have any good, solid plans for it long term—no bad plans, either, no plans at all—and the lostness of that, compared with the clear ambitions of my friends (marriage, children, law school), sometimes shamed me. Other times, in my mind I defended such a condition as morally and intellectually superior—my life was open and ready and free—but that did not make it any less lonely. I got up, trudged barefoot across the cold floor, and made a cup of coffee, with a brown plastic Melitta filter and a paper towel, dripping it into a single ceramic mug that said "Moose Timber Lodge." Murph had gone there once, for a weekend, with her new B.F.

The phone rang again before I'd had time to let the coffee kick in and give me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words to say; nonetheless, I picked up the receiver.

"Hi, is this Tassie?" the newly familiar voice said.

"Yes, it is." I frantically gulped at my coffee. What time was it? Too soon for calls.

"This is Sarah Brink. Did I wake you? I'm sorry. I'm calling too early, aren't I?"

"Oh, no," I said, lest she think I was a shiftless bum. Better a lying sack of shit. "I didn't know whether I'd left a message on the correct machine or not. And I wanted to get back to you as soon as possible before you accepted an offer from someone else." Little did she know—none of the five other women had even called. "I've talked it over with my husband, and we'd like to offer you the job."

Could she even have checked the references I'd listed? Had there been enough time?

"Oh, thank you," I said.

"We'll start you at ten dollars an hour, with the possibility of raises down the line. The problem is this: the job starts today."

"Today?" I sipped again.

"Yes, I'm sorry. We're going to Kronenkee to meet the birth mother, and we'd like you to come with us."

"Yes, well, I think that would be O.K."

"So you accept the position?"

"Yes, I guess I do."

"You do? You can't know how happy you've made me."

"Really?" I asked, all the while wondering, Where's the new employee's first-day orientation meeting? Where is the "You've Picked a Great Place to Work" PowerPoint presentation? The coffee was kicking in, but not helpfully.

"Oh, yes, really," she said. "Can you be here by noon?"

The appointment with the birth mother was for 2 P.M. at the Perkins restaurant in Kronenkee, a town an hour away with a part-German, part-Indian name that I'd always assumed meant "wampum." The social worker who ran the adoption agency was supposed to meet us there with the birth mother, so that we could all cheerfully assess one another. I had walked the half hour to Sarah Brink's house and then waited twenty minutes while she scrambled around doing things, making quick phone calls to her restaurant—"Meeska, the Concord coulis has got to be more than grape jam!"—or searching madly for her sunglasses ("I hate that snow glare on those two-lane roads"), all the while apologizing to me from the next room. In the car, on our way up, I sat next to her in the front seat, since her husband, Edward, whom, strangely, I still hadn't met, couldn't get out of some meeting or other and had apparently told Sarah to go ahead without him. "Marriage," Sarah said, sighing. As if I had any idea what that meant.

I looked sideways at Sarah, who was hatless, with a long cranberry scarf coiled twice about her neck. The sun caught the shiny artifice of her hair as well as the stray tufts of white lint on her peacoat. Still, especially with the sunglasses in winter—something I had seldom seen before—she looked glamorous. I was not used to speaking to adults, so I felt comfortable just being quiet with her, and soon she turned on the classical-music station and we listened to Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition" and "Night on Bald Mountain" for the entire ride. "They've told me the birth mother is very beautiful," Sarah said, at one point. And I said nothing, not knowing what to say.

We waited in the second booth at Perkins, Sarah and I sitting on the same side, to leave the opposite seat open for the two people we were waiting for. Sarah ordered Perkins's Bottomless Pot of Coffee for the entire table, and the waitress went away to get it. "Oh, look, here they are," Sarah murmured, and I looked up to see a heavily made-up middle-aged woman in a deep-pink parka holding the arm of a girl probably my age, maybe younger, who was very pregnant, very pretty, and who, as I could see, even from that distance, when she smiled at us, had scarcely a tooth in her head. We stood and moved toward them. The girl wore an electronic bracelet on her wrist, but was clearly unembarrassed by this because she energetically thrust her hand out of her sleeve in greeting. I shook it. "Hi," she said to me. I wondered what she had done, and why the bracelet was not around her ankle instead. Perhaps she had been very, very bad and had two.

"Hi," I replied, trying to smile companionably and not stare at her stomach.

"This is the mother, here," the woman in the pink parka told the pregnant girl, indicating Sarah. "Sarah Brink? Amber Bowers."

"Hi—it's so wonderful to meet you." Sarah grasped Amber's hand warmly and shook it for too long. Amber kept turning back hopefully toward me, as if she were as baffled as I was to be in the company of these mysterious middle-aged women.

"I'm Tassie Keltjin," I said quickly, shaking Amber's penalized hand again. The delicate knobs of her wrists and her elegant fingers were a strange contrast to her toothlessness and the hard plastic parole band. "I'm going to work for Sarah, as a childcare provider."

"And I'm Letitia Gherlich," the adoption-agency woman said, shaking my hand, though not letting go of Amber's coat sleeve, as if she might escape. Amber did have the face, if not currently the body, of someone who perhaps more than once had made a run for it.

"Hey, Letitia," Sarah said, and threw her arms around her as if they were old friends, though Letitia stiffened a little.

After that, things moved with swiftness and awkwardness both, like something simultaneously strong and broken. We hung up coats, we ordered, we ate, we made chitchat about the food and the snow. "Oh, there's my probation officer," Amber said, giggling; her face brightened, as if she had a little crush on him. "I think he sees us. He's sitting right over there by the window." We looked up to see the probation officer, his blue jacket still on, his bottomless Diet Coke stacked with ice. A going-to-seed hunk in a windbreaker: the world seemed full of them. We all just stared to buy ourselves time, I suppose, and to avoid the actual question of Amber's crimes.

Letitia began to speak to Sarah, on Amber's behalf. "Amber is happy to meet Tassie as well as you, Sarah." Here Amber looked across at me and rolled her eyes, as if we were two girls out with our embarrassing mothers. I had been noticing Amber's face, which was as lovely as advertised but sassy, with a strange electricity animating it; with the missing teeth she seemed like a slightly sophisticated hillbilly or an infant freak. Her hair was a gingery blond, shoulder length, as straight and coarse as a horse's tail.

Letitia, perhaps nervous about the sticky parts of a deal, went on cheerily, "The birth father is white. I did mention that to you, didn't I?"

Sarah said nothing, her face momentarily inscrutable.

Letitia continued. "Tall and good-looking, like Amber."

Amber smiled happily. "We broke up," she said, shrugging.

"Do you have a picture of him, though? To show Sarah?" Letitia was selling the idea of the handsome white-boy dad.

"I don't think I ever had a damn picture of him," Amber said, shaking her head. Now she looked at me, grinning. "Except in my mind. My mind's a regular exhibition." The phrase was oddly reminiscent of the Mussorgsky we'd listened to in the car. And her mouth, with its few and crooked teeth, bits of shell awash on a reef of gum, seemed a curious home for her voice, which was slowly surprising, with its intelligence and humor. There was a lull now. Amber suddenly leaned back, physically uncomfortable.

"So, where's your husband?" she asked Sarah.

I examined Sarah's face for the stiffened look of the accused.

"He's, oh, he's at a meeting his lab is having with the university. I run my own restaurant in town, so I can make up my own schedule as far as meetings go. But, well, he's at the beck and call of others—at least today he is."

"Do you think you really have time for a baby, owning a restaurant and all?" Amber was not shy. If she had been shy, not one of us would be at Perkins right now.

Sarah refused to be flustered. She'd clearly heard remarks of this sort a dozen times. But before she could speak Letitia spoke for her.

"That's why Tassie is here. Tassie's the backup. But Sarah will always be around. She'll be the mom. And she can do a lot of her work right out of the house—isn't that right, Sarah?"

What work could Sarah do from the house? Yell at Meeska about the coulis?

"Absolutely," Sarah said. "Oh, I forgot. I brought you a present, Amber." She took a CD from her purse. "It's a mixed CD of my favorite classical music."

Amber took it and stashed it in her bag with the most fleeting of glances. Perhaps she'd had a slew of these lunches as a means of collecting goodies, which she would later sell on eBay. "And I have a present for you, too," she said, and handed Sarah a foil-wrapped pat of butter she plucked from the bowl on the table. "*Mine's* wrapped!" Amber said, smiling wickedly. The CD hadn't been. A scalding boldness gripped Amber's face, then a kind of guilt, then drifty blankness, like songs off a jukebox list, flipped through unchosen.

"Thanks!" Sarah said gamely. You had to hand it to her. She opened up the butter and applied it to her mouth like lip gloss. "Prevents chapped lips."

"You're welcome," Amber said.

When we all walked out to the parking lot, the probation officer followed. An American flag was flapping noisily next to the Perkins sign; the air was picking up wind and snow. The probation officer walked to his car and got in but did not start it. Amber's face was completely lit up. I saw that she was fantastically in love with him. She was not concentrating on any of us, and something about this provoked Sarah.

"Well," she said, studying Amber with an artificial smile.

"Yes, well," Amber said.

"All right, then," Letitia said.

"Can I give you some advice, Amber?" Sarah asked, standing there, as Letitia clutched Amber even tighter. The windbreakered parole officer gave a wave and drove off.

"What?" Amber said to Sarah, but to me she smiled and said, "He was definitely following me."

"When I was your age, I had some rebellious ideas," Sarah continued her unsolicited advice to Amber. "I got in trouble now and again, here and there, but I realized it was because I was doing things I wasn't any good at. Look at this." She tapped Amber's electronic bracelet with a gloved index finger. "You're eighteen. Don't sell drugs. You're no good at it. Do something you're good at."

Sarah meant this tough-love speech compassionately, I could see, but Amber's face flushed with insult, then hardened. "That's what I'm trying to do," she said indignantly, and tore herself from Letitia's grip, walked over to what was apparently Letitia's car, and got in on the passenger side.

Baby, it's scold outside, Murph would have said if she had been there.

"We'll talk later," Letitia called to Sarah, waving goodbye and hurrying off to Amber.

"Well," Sarah said as we both got into

Sixty, Sexy, and Successful

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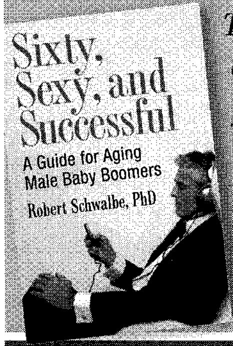

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her car. "That was, for all intents and purposes, a complete disaster." She started up the engine. "You know?" she continued. "I always do the wrong thing. I do the wrong thing so much that the times I actually do the right thing stand out so brightly in my memory that I forget I always do the wrong thing."

We rode home mostly in silence, Sarah offering me gum, then cough drops, both of which I took, thanking her. When I glanced over at her, driving without her sunglasses, her scarf wrapped now around her head like a babushka, she seemed watery, far away, lost in thought, and I wondered how a nice, attractive girl—for I thought I had glimpsed on the way up the girl she once was, her face still and thoughtful, her hair in the sun ablaze with light—how a girl like that became a lonely woman with a yarny schmatte on her head, became this, whatever it was. After a childhood of hungering to be an adult, I no longer felt much hunger. Unexpected fates had begun to catch my notice. These middle-aged women seemed very tired to me, as if hope had been wrung out of them and replaced with a deathly, walking sort of sleep.

Sarah's cell phone played the beginning of "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik," its vigorous twang not unlike a harpsichord, and so not completely offensive to the spirit of Mozart, who perhaps did not have to roll about in his grave as much as so many of his colleagues did, since the advent of electronic things.

Sarah pulled the phone from her bag, slowing the car slightly as she did. "Excuse me," she said to me. "Yeah?" she said into the phone. All this despite the bumper sticker on her car that read, "Perhaps You Would Drive Better with That Cell Phone Shoved up Your Ass." She also had one that said, "If God Speaks Through Burning Bushes, Let's Burn Bush and Listen to What God Says." It was interesting to me that such a woman, one with such rhetorical violence affixed to her car, had got past the adoption agency's screening procedures, whatever they were.

"Sarah, hi, it's Letitia," I heard.

I don't know why I could hear so clearly—perhaps Sarah was a little deaf and had the volume turned up high.

"Hi, Letitia." I believed I wasn't supposed to listen, so I looked out the window at the bleak snowy landscape; the sun was low and feeble, dissolving whitely like a lemon drop. Each town we passed through had a Dairy Queen, with customers lined up, even in winter. When I looked back at Sarah I saw her powdered, thinning skin like a crêpe, with the same light freckles as a crêpe, her gnarly-knuckled hand, arthritic from chopping herbs, going through her spiky russet hair, knocking back her scarf.

Education had not entirely elevated my concerns in life. It had probably not even assisted my analyses of these concerns. I was too fresh from childhood. Subconsciously, my deepest brain still a cupboard of fairy tales, I suppose I believed that if a pretty woman was no longer pretty she had done something bad to deserve it. I had a young girl's belief that this kind of negative aging would never happen to me. Death would happen to me—I knew this from reading British poetry. But the drying, hunching, blanching, hobbling, fading, fattening, thinning, slowing? I would just not let those things happen to *moi*.

Sarah switched ears, making it harder for me to hear, but then switched back and slowed to let a convoy of trucks pass. I could hear Letitia: "If this doesn't work out with Amber, there are babies on the international market. We've had a lot of luck with South America. Paraguay has opened up again, and other countries, too. And they're not all brown there, either. There's been a lot of German influence, and some of these kids are beautiful, very blond, or blue-eyed, or both."

"Well, thanks for the info," Sarah said brusquely. "Get back to me on Amber." Letitia then said something I couldn't make out, and Sarah said quickly, "Gotta run—there's an ice patch ahead," and snapped the phone shut.

"The babies of Nazis," Sarah said, shaking her head. "They're hawking Nazi babies. Racially superior. Unbelievable." She raked her fingers yet again through the bright desert grass of her hair. "Blue eyes!" she cried. "The human race has really come a long way!" She shook her head again, this time with a horsey, nasal exhalation of disgust.

"Yeah," I said dopily.

"You may be too young to know this yet, but eventually you will look around and notice: Nazis always have the last laugh."

Then we were wordless through the towns of Terre Noire and Fond du Marais, places named both whimsically and fearfully by French fur traders, before the subsequent flattened pronunciations by Scandinavian farmers made the names even more absurd: "Turn Ore" and "Fondu Morass."

"You'll find I say about eighty-nine per cent of what's on my mind," Sarah said. "For the other eleven per cent? I use a sauna."

She put a CD in the car player. "Bach's first French suite. Do you know it?" After some clicking and static, it began, stately and sad. "I think so," I said, not sure at all. My friends had already begun to lie, to bluff a sophistication that they felt they would authentically possess by the end of the ten-second bluff. I was not only less inclined this way but less skilled. "Maybe not, though," I added. Then, "Wait, it's ringing a bell."

"Oh, it's the most beautiful thing," she said. "Especially with this pianist." It was someone humming along with the light dirge of the Bach. Later, I would own every loopy Glenn Gould recording available, but there in the car with Sarah was the first time I'd ever heard him play. The piece was like an elegant interrogation made of tangled yarn, a query from a well-dressed man in a casket, not yet dead. It proceeded slowly, like a careful equation, and then not: if *x* equals *y*, if major equals minor, if death equals part of life and life part of death, then what is the sum of the infinite notes of this one phrase? It asked, answered, re-asked, its moody asking a refinement of reluctance or dislike. I had never heard a melody quite like it.

Outside my house, Sarah put the car in park. She patted me on the shoulder, then let her hand run down my coat sleeve. "Thanks," she said. "Phone me when you get back into town after Christmas." Her face looked fantastically sad.

"O.K.," I said. "Sounds good." *Sounds good.* It was the Midwestern girl's reply to everything. It appeared to clinch a deal, was somewhat the same as the more soldierly *Good to go*, except that it was promiseless—mere affirmative description. It got you away, out the door. ◆

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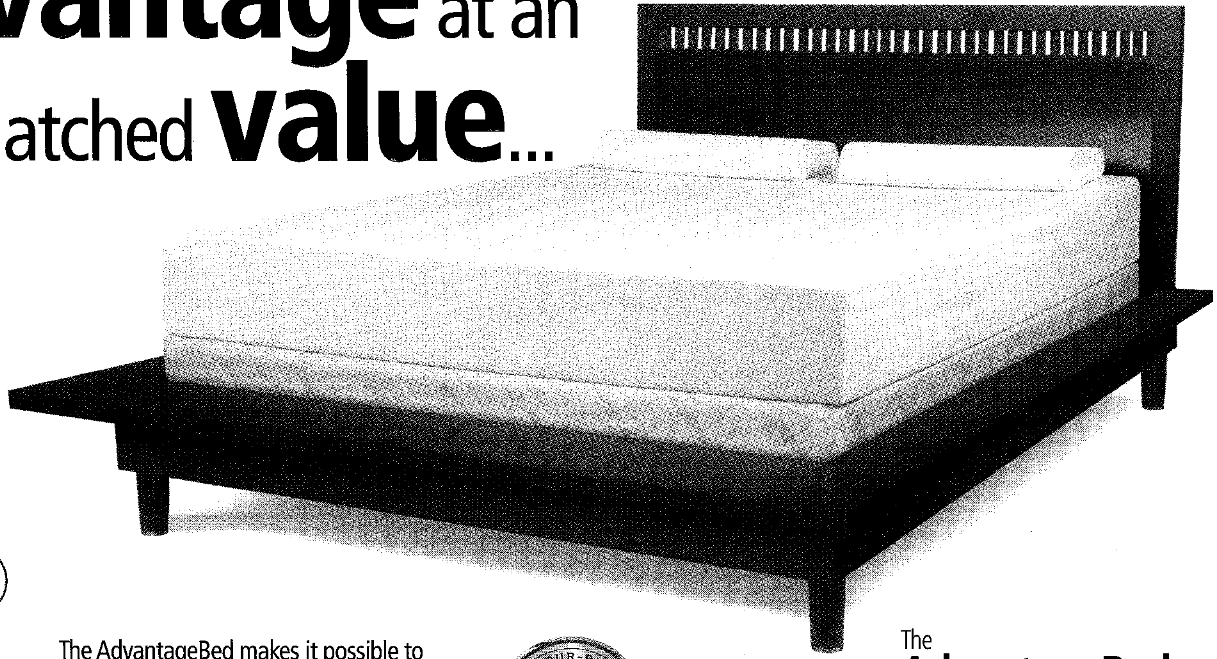

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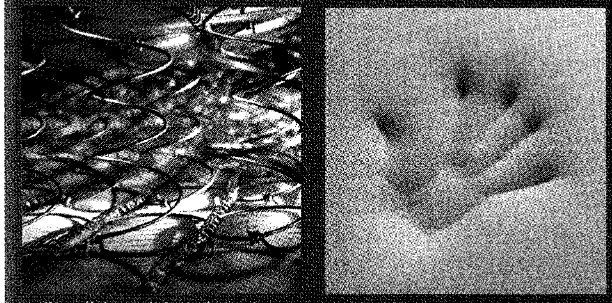

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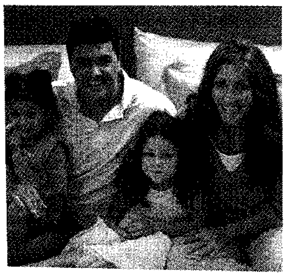

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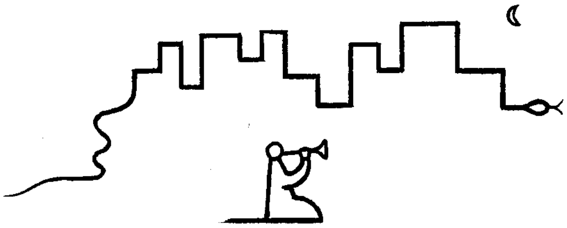

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Is free the future?

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

At a hearing on Capitol Hill in May, James Moroney, the publisher of the Dallas *Morning News*, told Congress about negotiations he'd just had with the online retailer Amazon. The idea was to license his newspaper's content to the Kindle, Amazon's new electronic reader. "They want seventy per cent of the subscription revenue," Moroney testified. "I get thirty per cent, they get seventy per cent. On top of that, they have said we get the right to republish your intellectual property to any portable device." The idea was that if a Kindle subscription to the Dallas *Morning News* cost ten dollars a month, seven dollars of that belonged to Amazon, the provider of the gadget on which the news was read, and just three dollars belonged to the newspaper, the provider of an expensive and ever-changing variety of editorial content. The people at Amazon valued the newspaper's contribution so little, in fact, that they felt they ought then to be able to license it to anyone else they wanted. Another witness at the hearing, Arianna Huffington, of the Huffington Post, said that she thought the Kindle could provide a business model to save the beleaguered newspaper industry. Moroney disagreed. "I get thirty per cent and they get the right to license my content to any portable device—not just ones made by Amazon?" He was incredulous. "That, to me, is not a model."

Had James Moroney read Chris Anderson's new book, "Free: The Future of a Radical Price" (Hyperion; $26.99), Amazon's offer might not have seemed quite so surprising. Anderson is the editor of *Wired* and the author of the 2006 best-seller "The Long Tail," and "Free" is essentially an extended elaboration of Stewart Brand's famous declaration that "information wants to be free." The digital age, Anderson argues, is exerting an inexorable downward pressure on the prices of all things "made of ideas." Anderson does not consider this a passing trend. Rather, he seems to think of it as an iron law: "In the digital realm you can try to keep Free at bay with laws and locks, but eventually the force of economic gravity will win." To musicians who believe that their music is being pirated, Anderson is blunt. They should stop complaining, and capitalize on the added exposure that piracy provides by making money through touring, merchandise sales, and "yes, the sale of some of [their] music to people who still want CDs or prefer to buy their music online." To the Dallas *Morning News*, he would say the same thing. Newspapers need to accept that content is never again going to be worth what they want it to be worth, and reinvent their business. "Out of the bloodbath will come a new role for professional journalists," he predicts, and he goes on:

> There may be more of them, not fewer, as the ability to participate in journalism extends beyond the credentialed halls of traditional media. But they may be paid far less, and for many it won't be a full time job at all. Journalism as a profession will share the stage with journalism as an avocation. Meanwhile, others may use their skills to teach and organize amateurs to do a better job covering their own communities, becoming more editor/coach than writer. If so, leveraging the Free—paying people to get *other* people to write for non-monetary rewards—may not be the enemy of professional journalists. Instead, it may be their salvation.

Anderson is very good at paragraphs like this—with its reassuring arc from "bloodbath" to "salvation." His advice is pithy, his tone uncompromising, and his subject matter perfectly timed for a moment when old-line content providers are desperate for answers. That said, it is not entirely clear what distinction is being marked between "paying people to get *other* people to write" and paying people to write. If you can afford to pay someone to get other people to write, why can't you pay people to write? It would be nice to know, as well, just how a business goes about reorganizing itself around getting people to work for "non-monetary rewards." Does he mean that the New York *Times* should be staffed by volunteers, like Meals on Wheels? Anderson's reference to people who "prefer to buy their music online" carries the faint suggestion that refraining from theft should be considered a mere preference. And then there is his insistence that the relentless downward pressure on prices represents an iron law of the digital economy. Why is it a law? Free is just another price, and prices are set by individual actors, in accordance with the aggregated particulars of marketplace power. "Information wants to be free," Anderson tells us, "in the same way that life wants to spread and water wants to run downhill." But information can't actually want anything, can it? *Amazon* wants the information in the Dallas paper to be free, because that way Amazon makes more money. Why are the self-interested motives of powerful companies being elevated to a philosophical principle? But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

Anderson's argument begins with a technological trend. The cost of the building blocks of all electronic activity—storage, processing, and bandwidth—has fallen so far that it is now approaching zero. In 1961, Anderson says, a single transistor was ten dollars. In 1963, it was five dollars. By 1968, it was one dollar. Today, Intel will sell you two billion transistors for eleven hundred dollars—meaning that the cost of a single transistor is now about .000055 cents.

Anderson's second point is that when prices hit zero extraordinary things happen. Anderson describes an experiment con-

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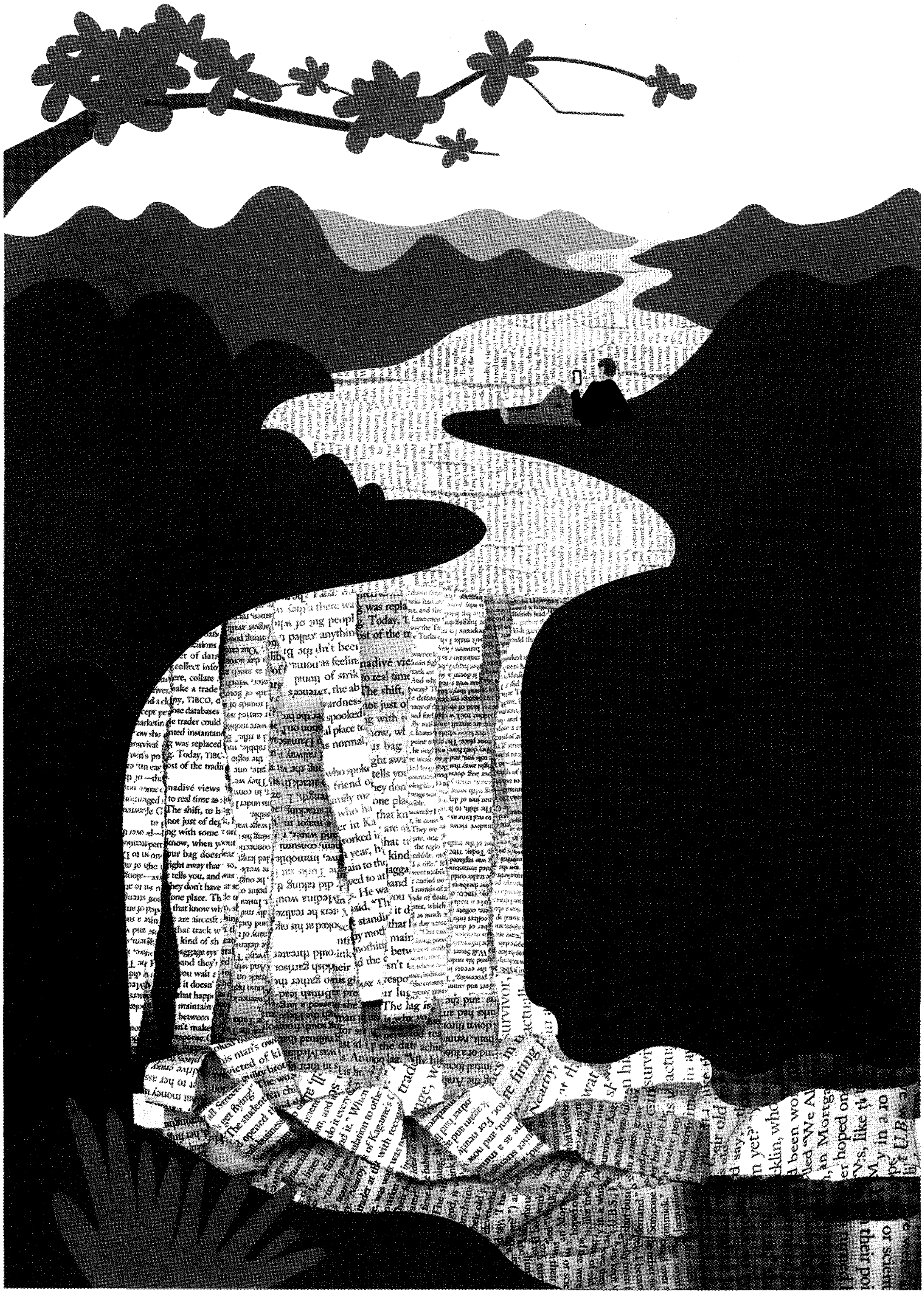

"In the digital realm you can try to keep Free at bay," Chris Anderson writes, "but eventually the force of economic gravity will win."

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A DREAM

In a deserted place in Iran there is a not very tall stone tower that has neither door nor window. In the only room (with a dirt floor and shaped like a circle) there is a wooden table and a bench. In that circular cell, a man who looks like me is writing in letters I cannot understand a long poem about a man who in another circular cell is writing a poem about a man who in another circular cell . . . The process never ends and no one will be able to read what the prisoners write.

—*Jorge Luis Borges*

(*Translated, from the Spanish, by Suzanne Jill Levine.*)

ducted by the M.I.T. behavioral economist Dan Ariely, the author of "Predictably Irrational." Ariely offered a group of subjects a choice between two kinds of chocolate—Hershey's Kisses, for one cent, and Lindt truffles, for fifteen cents. Three-quarters of the subjects chose the truffles. Then he redid the experiment, reducing the price of both chocolates by one cent. The Kisses were now free. What happened? The order of preference was reversed. Sixty-nine per cent of the subjects chose the Kisses. The price difference between the two chocolates was exactly the same, but that magic word "free" has the power to create a consumer stampede. Amazon has had the same experience with its offer of free shipping for orders over twenty-five dollars. The idea is to induce you to buy a second book, if your first book comes in at less than the twenty-five-dollar threshold. And that's exactly what it does. In France, however, the offer was mistakenly set at the equivalent of twenty cents—and consumers didn't buy the second book. "From the consumer's perspective, there is a huge difference between cheap and free," Anderson writes. "Give a product away, and it can go viral. Charge a single cent for it and you're in an entirely different business. . . . The truth is that zero is one market and any other price is another."

Since the falling costs of digital technology let you make as much stuff as you want, Anderson argues, and the magic of the word "free" creates instant demand among consumers, then Free (Anderson honors it with a capital) represents an enormous business opportunity. Companies ought to be able to make huge amounts of money "around" the thing being given away—as Google gives away its search and e-mail and makes its money on advertising.

Anderson cautions that this philosophy of embracing the Free involves moving from a "scarcity" mind-set to an "abundance" mind-set. Giving something away means that a lot of it will be wasted. But because it costs almost nothing to make things, digitally, we can afford to be wasteful. The elaborate mechanisms we set up to monitor and judge the quality of content are, Anderson thinks, artifacts of an era of scarcity: we had to worry about how to allocate scarce resources like newsprint and shelf space and broadcast time. Not anymore. Look at YouTube, he says, the free video archive owned by Google. YouTube lets anyone post a video to its site free, and lets anyone watch a video on its site free, and it doesn't have to pass judgment on the quality of the videos it archives. "Nobody is deciding whether a video is good enough to justify the scarce channel space it takes, because there is no scarce channel space," he writes, and goes on:

> Distribution is now close enough to free to round down. Today, it costs about $0.25 to stream one hour of video to one person. Next year, it will be $0.15. A year later it will be less than a dime. Which is why YouTube's founders decided to give it away. . . . The result is both messy and runs counter to every instinct of a television professional, but this is what abundance both requires and demands.

There are four strands of argument here: a technological claim (digital infrastructure is effectively Free), a psychological claim (consumers love Free), a procedural claim (Free means never having to make a judgment), and a commercial claim (the market created by the technological Free and the psychological Free can make you a lot of money). The only problem is that in the middle of laying out what he sees as the new business model of the digital age Anderson is forced to admit that one of his main case studies, YouTube, "has so far failed to make any money for Google."

Why is that? Because of the very principles of Free that Anderson so energetically celebrates. When you let people upload and download as many videos as they want, lots of them will take you up on the offer. That's the magic of Free psychology: an estimated seventy-five billion videos will be served up by YouTube this year. Although the magic of Free technology means that the cost of serving up each video is "close enough to free to round down," "close enough to free" multiplied by seventy-five billion is still a very large number. A recent report by Credit Suisse estimates that YouTube's bandwidth costs in 2009 will be three hundred and sixty million dollars. In the case of YouTube, the effects of technological Free and psychological Free work against each other.

So how does YouTube bring in revenue? Well, it tries to sell advertisements alongside its videos. The problem is that the videos attracted by psychological Free—pirated material, cat videos, and other forms of user-generated content—are not the sort of thing that advertisers want to be associated with. In order to sell advertising, YouTube has had to buy the rights to professionally produced content, such as television shows and movies. Credit Suisse put the cost of those licenses in 2009 at roughly two hundred and sixty million dollars. For Anderson, YouTube illustrates the principle that Free removes the necessity of aesthetic judgment. (As he puts it, YouTube proves that "crap is in the eye of the beholder.") But, in order to make money, YouTube has been obliged to pay for programs that *aren't* crap. To recap: YouTube is a great example of Free, except that Free technology ends up not being Free because of the way consumers respond to Free, fatally compromising YouTube's ability to make money around Free, and forcing it to retreat from the "abundance thinking" that lies at the heart of Free. Credit Suisse estimates that YouTube will lose close to half a billion dollars this year. If it were a bank, it would be eligible for TARP funds.

Anderson begins the second part of his book by quoting Lewis Strauss, the former head of the Atomic Energy Commission, who famously predicted in the mid-nineteen-fifties that

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"our children will enjoy in their homes electrical energy too cheap to meter."

"What if Strauss had been right?" Anderson wonders, and then diligently sorts through the implications: as much fresh water as you could want, no reliance on fossil fuels, no global warming, abundant agricultural production. Anderson wants to take "too cheap to meter" seriously, because he believes that we are on the cusp of our own "too cheap to meter" revolution with computer processing, storage, and bandwidth. But here is the second and broader problem with Anderson's argument: he is asking the wrong question. It is pointless to wonder what would have happened if Strauss's prediction *had* come true while rushing past the reasons that it could *not* have come true.

Strauss's optimism was driven by the fuel cost of nuclear energy—which was so low compared with its fossil-fuel counterparts that he considered it (to borrow Anderson's phrase) close enough to free to round down. Generating and distributing electricity, however, requires a vast and expensive infrastructure of transmission lines and power plants—and it is this infrastructure that accounts for most of the cost of electricity. Fuel prices are only a small part of that. As Gordon Dean, Strauss's predecessor at the A.E.C., wrote, "Even if coal were mined and distributed free to electric generating plants today, the reduction in your monthly electricity bill would amount to but twenty per cent, so great is the cost of the plant itself and the distribution system."

This is the kind of error that technological utopians make. They assume that their particular scientific revolution will wipe away all traces of its predecessors—that if you change the fuel you change the whole system. Strauss went on to forecast "an age of peace," jumping from atoms to human hearts. "As the world of chips and glass fibers and wireless waves goes, so goes the rest of the world," Kevin Kelly, another *Wired* visionary, proclaimed at the start of his 1998 digital manifesto, "New Rules for the New Economy," offering up the same non sequitur. And now comes Anderson. "The more products are made of ideas, rather than stuff, the faster they can get cheap," he writes, and we know what's coming next: "However, this is not limited to digital products." Just look at the pharmaceutical industry, he says. Genetic engineering means that drug development is poised to follow the same learning curve of the digital world, to "accelerate in performance while it drops in price."

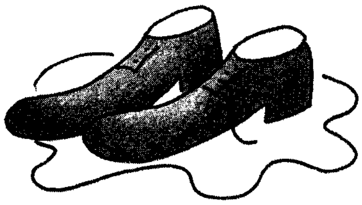
But, like Strauss, he's forgotten about the plants and the power lines. The expensive part of making drugs has never been what happens in the laboratory. It's what happens after the laboratory, like the clinical testing, which can take years and cost hundreds of millions of dollars. In the pharmaceutical world, what's more, companies have chosen to use the potential of new technology to do something very different from their counterparts in Silicon Valley. They've been trying to find a way to serve smaller and smaller markets—to create medicines tailored to very specific subpopulations and strains of diseases—and smaller markets often mean higher prices. The biotechnology company Genzyme spent five hundred million dollars developing the drug Myozyme, which is intended for a condition, Pompe disease, that afflicts fewer than ten thousand people worldwide. That's the quintessential modern drug: a high-tech, targeted remedy that took a very long and costly path to market. Myozyme is priced at three hundred thousand dollars a year. Genzyme isn't a mining company: its real assets are intellectual property—information, not stuff. But, in this case, information does not want to be free. It wants to be really, really expensive.

And there's plenty of other information out there that has chosen to run in the opposite direction from Free. The *Times* gives away its content on its Web site. But the *Wall Street Journal* has found that more than a million subscribers are quite happy to pay for the privilege of reading online. Broadcast television—the original practitioner of Free—is struggling. But premium cable, with its stiff monthly charges for specialty content, is doing just fine. Apple may soon make more money selling iPhone downloads (ideas) than it does from the iPhone itself (stuff). The company could one day give away the iPhone to boost downloads; it could give away the downloads to boost iPhone sales; or it could continue to do what it does now, and charge for both. Who knows? The only iron law here is the one too obvious to write a book about, which is that the digital age has so transformed the ways in which things are made and sold that there are no iron laws. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Castle, *by J. Robert Lennon (Graywolf; $22).* When Eric Loesch returns to the small town in upstate New York where he was reared, he dutifully describes life there in meticulous detail: the woman who sells him his dilapidated house and its six hundred and twelve acres, the hardware store he visits, the large outcropping of rock he can see from his bedroom window. And when he discovers that this rock in the center of his view marks a tiny patch of land that is not, legally, his, and that the owner's name has been blacked out on the property deed, he decides to fill the gap in the official record. Meanwhile, the reader is wrestling with the narrator's own troubling omissions: Why does Eric hate his sister? Why can he remember so little of his childhood, and why won't the woman in the hardware store sell him a gun? As Lennon investigates the lethal consequences of failing to question authority, what begins as a claustrophobic tale of suspense gradually becomes an indictment of national policy.

Please Step Back, *by Ben Greenman (Melville House; $16.95).* "The Foxxes were a popular Bay Area rock and soul band led by the Rock Foxx (born Robert Franklin). The group made its name in the late sixties with a pair of ebullient anthems, 'Make It Better' and 'We All Need a Place in the Sun.' " So reads an encyclopedia of rock and roll owned by Franklin's estranged wife in this fictional history of the Foxxes' ascent to psychedelic superstardom. Alternating between her perspectives and Franklin's, Greenman maintains a playful and elastic style, as if every line had come from a Foxxes song. Pauses are not just pregnant; they are "carrying twins." As the band becomes embroiled in drug culture and the marriage starts to dissolve, we are reminded that "you can only paint the town red so many times before you begin to bleed."



Bigfoot, *by Joshua Blu Buhs (Chicago; $29).* In 1832, the British Resident in the court of Nepal reported that the natives had spotted a "furred, upright, tailless demon." In 1989, a Canadian woman and her grandson thought they saw a Sasquatch and joked that they should offer him a beer. Buhs traces the journey between these perceptions of elusive wild men and discovers a story of twentieth-century shifts in American culture and class. Bigfoot was both a product of the postwar ascendance of mass culture and a reaction to it, capturing the imagination of those who longed to "touch the really real behind the false front of consumer goods and scientific arrogance." The book is most interesting when revisiting men's adventure magazines and rural "four-waller" movies. It is silliest when asserting that "by imagining themselves into the body of Sasquatch, white working-class men could imagine themselves as black, as women, could come in contact with their own souls."

Will You Take Me as I Am, *by Michelle Mercer (Free Press; $24.99).* The emotional depth of Joni Mitchell's 1971 album "Blue" established a new standard for personal songwriting, attaining an artistry that Mitchell refined in a handful of influential records, culminating with "Hejira," in 1976. Mercer attempts to explore Mitchell's formative experiences and her creative process during this period, abetted by the coöperation of the usually unforthcoming singer. There are juicy tidbits in tales of Mitchell's youth in western Canada; travels in Greece and across America; romances with Leonard Cohen, Graham Nash, James Taylor, and Sam Shepard; and a bracing encounter with the Tibetan monk Chögyam Trungpa. But Mitchell's ability to articulate the sublime frequently reduces Mercer to a kind of fan-girl gush, and Mitchell herself, open and vulnerable in her art, comes across as prickly and contentious, convinced that she's underappreciated, no matter how much praise she gets.

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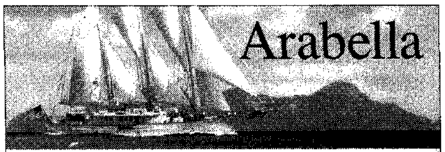

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MUSICAL EVENTS

SYMPHONY OF THE CITY

The Make Music festival overtakes New York.

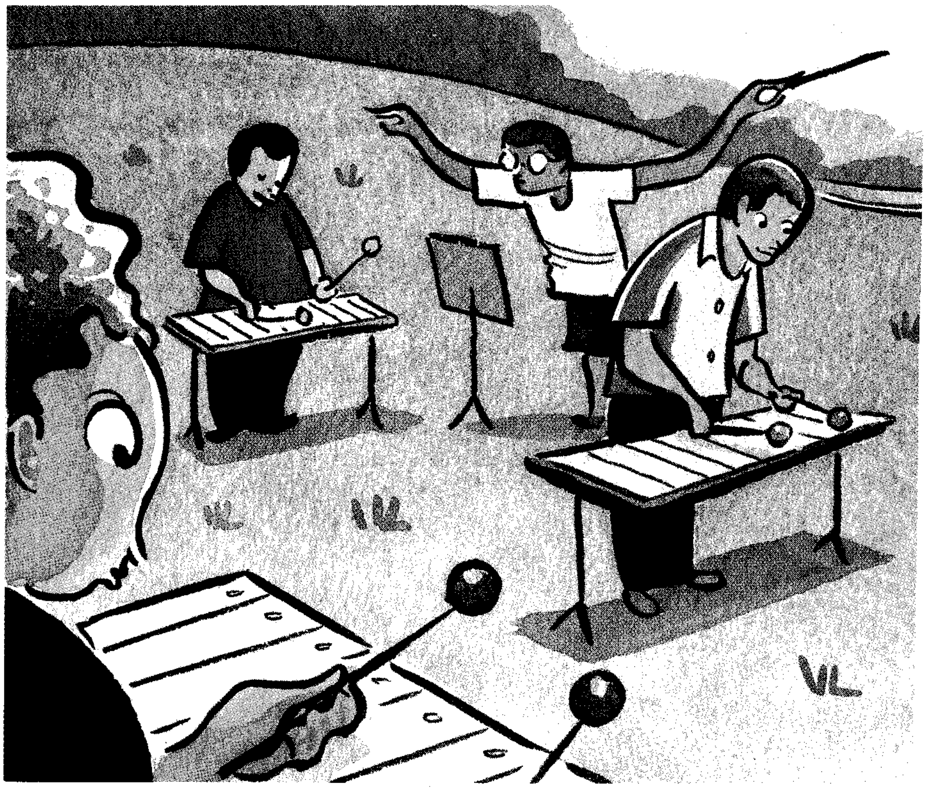
BY ALEX ROSS

"If only I could have done it," Charles Ives once said. "It's all there—the mountains and the fields." The composer was speaking of his dream project, the "Universe Symphony," which was to have depicted nothing less than the formation, the evolution, and the future of the world, from the rocks below to the heavens above. Ives's sketches are fragmentary, but they suggest an immensely complex structure in which rhythms, tempos, harmonies, timbres, and tuning systems are superimposed in a cosmic blur. (Two realizations, by Larry Austin and by Johnny Reinhard, give an enticing idea of what might have been.) Ives imagined presenting the work outdoors, with multiple orchestras and choruses positioned on mountaintops and in valleys. The ideal performance might consist of a population playing and singing for itself. Ives never liked concert halls, and in the "Universe" he releases music back into the wild.

I thought of Ives several times on June 21st, when New York joined more than three hundred cities—including Montevideo, Djibouti, Kabul, Hanoi, and Sydney—in celebrating Make Music, a global sonic bacchanal that takes place each year on the summer solstice. The ritual began in France, in 1982, when Maurice Fleuret, a critic turned bureaucrat, proposed that Paris hold a Fête de la Musique, favoring amateur musicians over professionals. The Fête has become an institution, with pop acts filling the Champs-Élysées and classical outfits joining in. (This year's edition culminated with Pierre Boulez conducting Stravinsky beneath the pyramid at the Louvre.) The New York version, which started two years ago, is somewhat scrappier, although the sum of activity was impressive—more than eight hundred events across five boroughs. There is something subversive, almost Situationist, in seeing two punk girls shouting abrasive lyrics in front of a Village storefront, or in finding a clutch of French-horn players tooting Wagner in Central Park. Such musical disruptions invite urban dwellers to abandon their tight routines and let the rhythms of the city take over.

I began the day at 10:30 A.M., in front of Ollie's, a Chinese restaurant near Lincoln Center. Teen-aged students from the Kaufman Center, on West Sixty-seventh Street, were performing Terry Riley's pulse-driven masterpiece "In C," with a small audience gathered on the sidewalk outside. An electric guitarist supplied a funky tinge, and a violinist added authentically minimalist vocalise. Then I went to Union Square, where a group calling itself the New York Megaphonica chanted self-referential slogans through megaphones. ("People come together to make noise, to make noise.") By 1 P.M., I was at the East Meadow, in Central Park, for a rendition of Aaron Siegel's new piece "Science Is Only a Sometimes Friend," for an orchestra of glockenspiels. A core ensemble played the score, and toy glockenspiels were distributed to the crowd, which had its own instructions: Siegel's associates held up cue cards to indicate when we should move from one note to another. Several small children chose to depart from the score and improvise freely, their cadenzas giving a jazzy flavor to the hazy, hypnotic clouds of chiming tones.

After checking out John Morton's "Central Park Sound Tunnel"—a rumbling electronic installation in a passageway near the zoo—and ambling west, I took the No. 1 train to Straus Park, at 106th Street, to see the first few numbers of a hard-driving set by the percussion duo Loop 2.4.3. Then downtown again, to the West Village, where the Yamaha company had parked four pianos in the middle of Cornelia Street, and members of Composers Collaborative, led by Jed Distler, were performing "Canto Ostinato," by the Dutch minimalist Simeon ten Holt. A light rain had begun to fall; the pianos were protected by tents. I took a sidewalk table at the Cornelia Street Café, ordered a burger, and had the pleasant feeling of entering into a whimsical art movie: the decorous, wistful repetitions of ten Holt's music lent an air of mystery to the dripping of water from the awning, the gliding whoosh of bicyclists in orange rain gear, and the waitress's commentary on the menu. It was in the spirit of the day to



In Central Park's East Meadow, an orchestra of glockenspiels performed Aaron Siegel's

MARCELLUS HALL

be charmed rather than annoyed by the accidental music of the city: the beeping of a bus's wheelchair lift during "In C"; the syncopated barking of a dog energized by the drumming of Loop 2.4.3.

Various Make Music events—the pianos, the glockenspiels, the megaphones, and a gathering of bagpipes on Staten Island, which, regrettably, I missed—articulated a running theme called Mass Appeal: convocations of many instruments of the same type. We were building to the grand finale, New York's answer to Boulez beneath the pyramid: a presentation of Henry Brant's "Orbits," for eighty trombones, organ, and soprano, in the great spiralling rotunda of the Guggenheim Museum. Brant, who died last year, at the age of ninety-four, was one of those cussedly brilliant outsider composers who are never recognized as widely as they should be and seem to prefer it that way. He specialized in summoning flocks of instruments and dispatching them into the cityscape: in Amsterdam, in 1984, he filled four barges with flute players and had them converse musically with church carillons. He was also an orchestrator of genius who made a compelling symphony out of Ives's "Concord Sonata." He talked of completing the "Universe," but never did.

Some of Brant's works meander, but "Orbits" is a tautly structured score that strikes deeper than its gimmicky-seeming concept suggests. The language owes much to Ives in his ultra-dissonant, prophet-on-the-mountaintop mode, with debts also to the otherworldly cluster harmonies of Henry Cowell, Iannis Xenakis, and György Ligeti. In one thrilling passage, the trombone choir fans out from the note G to make a pulsating mass of eighty separate quarter-tones. The noise at the Guggenheim was extreme—an application on my iPhone recorded a maximum of a hundred decibels—but never gaudy; the piece has episodes of muted, Rothko-like beauty and ends with a ghostly, ancient-sounding chant. The trombonists stood in rows along the spiral; the composer Neely Bruce conducted expertly from the lower part of the ramp, and the audience gathered on the floor below. The golden sheen of the instruments contrasted with the creamy white of the walls and the blue of the skylight above. There were two performances, and I stayed for both, guessing that I would never hear, see, or feel anything like it again.

Two Sundays before Make Music New York, the Brooklyn-based venue Issue Project Room, an indispensable site of offbeat programming, organized its own sonic jamboree. Twenty-one musicians led groups on "soundwalks" around Brooklyn and other boroughs, treating the city either as an audio source or as a stage for their work. (The term "soundwalk" was popularized by the Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer, who, in the spirit of Ives and John Cage, has long blurred distinctions between composed music and ambient sounds.) Two dozen people signed up for a soundwalk with Betsey Biggs, a young Princeton-trained composer and interdisciplinary artist who often creates site-specific performances. Beforehand, Biggs directed participants to a Web site where they could download "Detox Project," an electronic piece that she had assembled for the occasion. It consisted largely of sounds recorded in and around the murky old Gowanus Canal, in Brooklyn: machine noises, trucks backing up, the bell of a rising drawbridge, sirens, pedestrian chatter, and, for a long while, a voice softly humming a childlike, three-note melody.

"Science Is Only a Sometimes Friend"—hazy, hypnotic clouds of chiming tones.

Late in the afternoon, we met at a boarded-up house at the corner of Third Street and Third Avenue and began following Biggs's lead, listening to "Detox Project" on earphones. The streets were deserted, except for a few hipsters pushing strollers. It was unsettling to hear loud sounds without seeing their source. Conversely, certain noises that seemed to emanate from the soundtrack actually came from real life: I was surprised to see live birds in a dead tree. The experience proved to be psychologically complex, exposing how we orient ourselves with our ears. And, as Biggs notes in her Princeton dissertation, this kind of work plays off Internet-era listening habits—the use of manicured playlists to create what she calls a "cinematic lull," a "solitary dream state." When the walk curled through the quiet streets of Carroll Gardens, the collage of noises subsided and the human voice took over. Biggs began banging on a tin drum that she'd brought along, and a friend played an accordion. An electronically mediated experience veered toward old-time music-making. At the end, we stood on the Third Street drawbridge and applauded the composer, who smiled bashfully, nodding toward the strangely beautiful ruined landscape behind her. ♦

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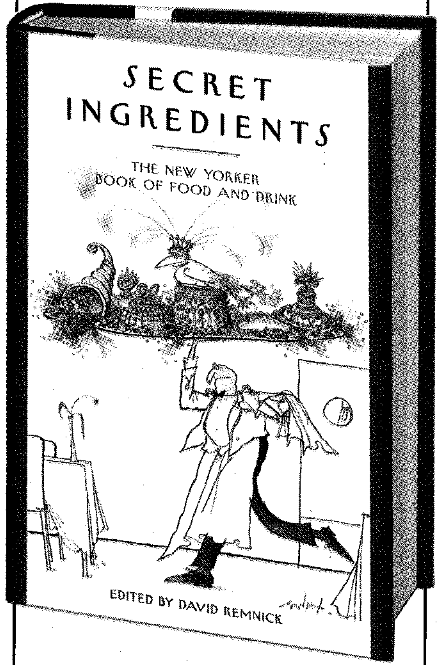

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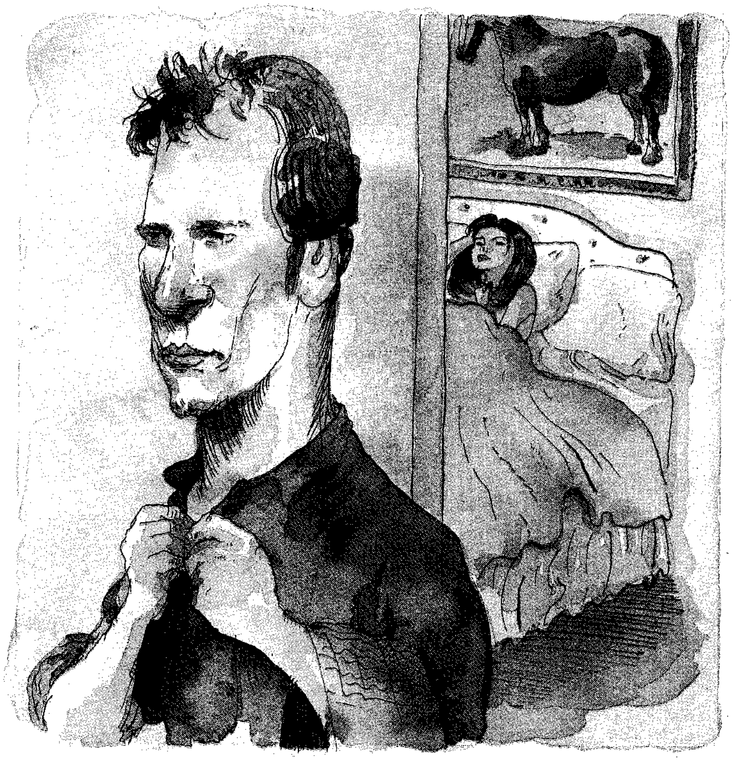
BY NANCY FRANKLIN



Thomas Jane as a teacher who puts his biggest asset to use in "Hung."

The title of the new HBO Sunday-night series "Hung" isn't meant to be a double entendre of the kind that induces snickers—it's straightforward descriptive slang, a reference to the physical endowments of the show's main character, Ray Drecker (Thomas Jane). But the word, despite what it implies about size, also denotes deflation, death, and twisting in the wind. That meaning fits Ray, too: he is a history teacher and basketball coach at the same high school in suburban Detroit where he was a star athlete twenty-five years ago; his wife, Jessica (Anne Heche), left him for a dermatologist, a dweeb they went to high school with; he had to move into the lakeshore bungalow that he grew up in, next door to a "prick lawyer" in a mansion who treats him like a garden pest; and he makes "more than a waiter, less than a plumber." When his bungalow, whose insurance he allowed to lapse, is gutted by fire, he's pushed even closer to the edge—his finances force him to live in a tent in his yard until the bungalow is fixed. His kids, sixteen-year-old twins named Damon and Darby (Charlie Saxton and Sianoa Smit-McPhee), want to be with him, but they're not about to camp out, so they go to stay with their mother.

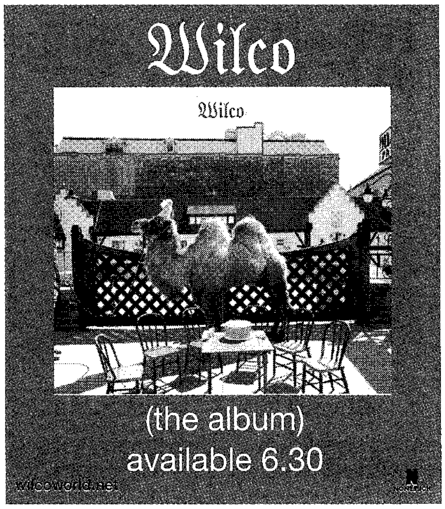
It's no coincidence that "Hung" is set in the capital city of mistakes and their consequences—Ray's spirit reflects the hopelessness around him. "Everything's falling apart," he says in a voice-over at the beginning of the first episode, explaining what didn't need to be explained. "And it all starts right here in Detroit, the headwaters of a river of failure." As Ray talks about the way things used to be in his parents' day, when "proud Americans . . . had normal jobs and made a normal living," the camera shows the nearly demolished Tiger Stadium being further ripped apart, the large Gothic "D" on its exterior metal frame now crumpled history. Ray is stuck sitting amid his own wreckage, in a lawn chair by his dock with a beer in his hand, thinking, "What happened to my life? I used to be a big deal. I used to be going somewhere. Now all I ever seem to do is try not to drown. When did life become something you buy?" It's hard to know whether the tediousness of Ray's interior monologue is meant to be funny—the writers' wink at his failure to recognize how good he actually has it—or whether you're supposed to respond more tenderly toward him. But I didn't so much feel Ray's isolation from the world as I felt my own isolation from him. Thomas Jane is a very handsome man, and he's in great shape (he's forty), but he doesn't give off much. Combine Bill Paxton, Kevin Costner, Thomas Haden Church, Ryan O'Neal, and Mark Valley in a blender, and then serve cold: you'll have Ray. Jane played the Marvel comic-book character the Punisher in the 2004 movie of the same name (and Mickey Mantle in the fine HBO movie "61*," about the 1961 home-run rivalry between Mantle and Roger Maris). He has the taut body of an action hero (buns of steel and all that), but no galvanic potential; it's as if someone had opened up his back and removed his batteries.

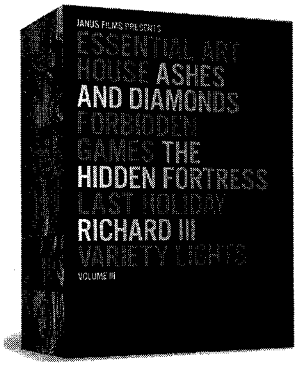
What gets Ray going again is a brainstorm that comes from an unlikely source. He has sex with a poet named Tanya (Jane Adams), a classmate in a marketing course he takes in an attempt to learn some new tricks about making money; when he can't even pretend to be interested in her postcoitally, she yells at him for his egomania, shouting from her balcony as he's leaving, "Why don't you go market your dick!" His ex-wife has already said much the same thing: in high school, when she was a cheerleader and he was king of the playing fields, she says, he was "beautiful and athletic and talented and smart and popular—and hung." "What am I now?" he asks her as she's tearing off in her car. "Now you're just hung!" she yells. (Heche, who was good in the cancelled series "Men in Trees," is at her best when she plays unhinged.) Ray's new trick is to turn tricks, spurred on by the entrepreneurial Tanya—who, for some reason, decides that her path to empowerment is to be Ray's pimp.

BARRY BLITT

I'm a little concerned that I'm making this sound clever; it's not. Very little resonates or clicks in this show, and it feels like a bunch of ideas left over from its creators' other enterprises, the dry ends of the roasts. "Hung" comes from the husband-and-wife team of Dmitry Lipkin and Colette Burson, who also wrote three of the first four episodes and are executive producers. Lipkin created the series "The Riches," about a family of gypsies who posed as upper middle class and found that they were quite good at swimming and swindling in the mainstream. The writer-director Alexander Payne is also an executive producer, and he directed the hour-long pilot of "Hung." In Payne's previous work—his movies include "About Schmidt" and "Sideways"—men of a certain age, like Ray, find themselves at a crossroads and fling themselves forward on picaresque, compassless journeys. Ray's journey happens to be taking place at home, but the impulse is similar, albeit with a twist. Can he become a new man, a man with some purpose, by being a gigolo? He'd better: he needs the money. For all his griping about how loudly money talks in modern America, once he gets a taste of the rewards that come from answering its call he's energized. He has, if you will, skin in the game. Instead of wearing his drab high-school-teacher outfit, he starts dressing for success in a sleek, dark suit; the first time he wears it to a woman's apartment, he keeps the tag attached, just in case, but soon enough he pulls it off, with a sense of occasion, as if he were opening a bottle of champagne.

It's not yet possible to tell where "Hung" is going—I've seen four episodes out of the season's ten—but at this point it reminds me a little too much, in tone and substance, of a couple of recent high-concept cable series, in which characters, with an ease that is supposed to strike us as questionable and yet understandable, cross the line between legal and illegal, making us ask ourselves whether the line is in the right place. You've got Showtime's "Weeds," in which a respectable adult turns to drug dealing. You've got AMC's "Breaking Bad," in which a high-school teacher turns to drugmaking. And you've got Showtime's "Dexter" (a forensics expert who's also a serial killer) and Showtime's "Nurse Jackie" (a drug-addicted R.N. who steals pills from the hospital pharmacy and uses while on duty). "Hung" is timely, but strangely superficial. It doesn't really examine the American dream; it just tickles it. ♦

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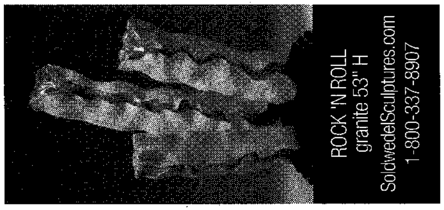

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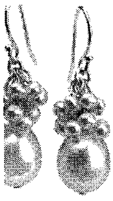

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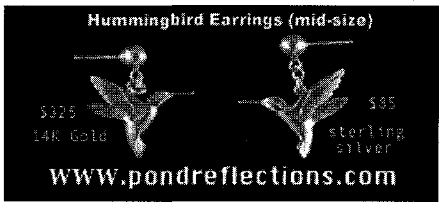

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James Ensor's irreality.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

The James Ensor retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art will affect many viewers like the detonation of a bomb whose fuse has been fizzing inconspicuously for a century. It concerns a titanic exception to standard accounts of Western art since the late nineteenth century. The maniacal Belgian Ensor (1860-1949) was an outlier on purpose. He rarely strayed far, during a career of seventy-six years, from the attic of his family's house and souvenir shop—it sold seashells, Chinese goods, carnival masks, and whatnot—in the small seaside resort town of Ostend. Some of his imagery is familiar enough: cavorting skeletons; demonic figures; MOMA's own delicately brushed and colored nightmares, "Tribulations of Saint Anthony" (1887) and "Masks Mocking Death (Masks Confronting Death)" (1888); and the overwhelming, mural-size magnum opus, "Christ's Entry Into Brussels in 1889" (1888), which swamps a diminutive Jesus, on a donkey, in mobs of grotesques and flurries of incongruous banners and signs—one for Colman's Mustard greets the Saviour. (That painting never leaves the Getty Museum, in Los Angeles.) But I doubt that anyone not a specialist will be fully prepared for this show's violent grandeur. I wasn't, though I've always liked Ensor, considering him nearly the peer of Edvard Munch as a fugitive shooting star of the Northern European fin de siècle. For many years, I kept a flimsy poster of an 1898 Ensor etching, "Hop-Frog's Revenge," illustrating a gaudy tale by Edgar Allan Poe, Scotch-taped to the back of my office door, until it disintegrated. I never quite knew why, but now I see that the tableau of figures chained together, and being burned alive, in the air of a cavernous hall, before masses of tiny onlookers, distills in its dense web of energetic marks an elixir of pure, sweet malice—lending comfort to crotchets that aren't scarce among writers in peevish solitude. The MOMA show affirms Ensor as a driven comic of the innocently malevolent id: part Lenny Bruce, part Richard Pryor, all sneering cheek. He employed his first-rate aesthetic acumen to pound home one nasty joke after another.

Ensor's life story makes his eccentricity predictable and his greatness astonishing. Except for his father, an English drunk who died of exposure in a doorway when Ensor was twenty-seven, he grew up in a family of women: grandmother, mother, aunt, sister. His sexuality is opaque. He could be stunningly misogynistic, characterizing womanhood, in a poem from 1925, as a "horrible cesspit, teeming with leeches." He could also be gallant, as in recounting his nativity on "the day of Venus," a Friday: "At my birth Venus came toward me, smiling, and we looked long into each other's eyes. She smelled pleasantly of seawater." From the age of twenty-eight, he had a lifelong companion, Augusta Boogaerts, an innkeeper's daughter whom he did not marry and with whom he never cohabited. A painting from 1891 or 1893, not in the show, displays her as a heavyset woman trying to lure him into the water at the beach, as he shrinks back. It calls to mind James Thurber's theme of matronly battle-axes and hapless milquetoasts—though this particular wuss wasn't shy about casting himself, on occasion, as Jesus Christ. (That's him on the donkey in the "Entry Into Brussels" and nailed to the Cross in a drawing from 1886, "Calvary.")

Nor was he an easygoing friend to members of his own sex. Having achieved leadership, in 1883, of a Brussels-centered group of avant-garde painters, the Twenty, he seethed when his comrades shifted their fancy from developments of his early style—thickly layered, dark-hued paint, suffused with smoldering light—to the shimmering Neo-Impressionism of Georges Seurat. He became "an alienated army of one," the show's curator, Anna Swinbourne, writes in the catalogue, and he holed up in Ostend for good, decisively turning his attention from naturalistic interiors, portraits, and other things of this world to stuff of another that was visible only to himself. He specialized in funny and frothing satirical assaults on doctors, judges, priests, politicians, King Leopold II (who nonetheless knighted him, in 1903), and humanity as an unlovely whole. As often happens with intensely febrile young talents—including Munch, who, like Ensor, took to repeating the motifs of his early masterpieces, to mediocre effect—he calcified as he approached middle age. Ensor's art after 1900 or so is generally feeble, though sometimes still infectious. Having got into your head, even once, he stays there like unforgettable music.

Ensor painted like an angel while conceiving like a devil. His ability is apparent from the start, in conventional parlor scenes, landscapes, and cityscapes marked by phenomenal tonal subtlety, coloristic charm, and visceral touch. He absorbed, and turned to fine account, influences of Courbet, Manet, Turner, and Whistler. An 1882 picture of a woman at lunch, "The Oyster Eater," rehearses virtuoso effects of light on food, flowers, and glassware with contemptuous nonchalance. Ensor's gifts suited him for any number of stylistic directions. "Children Dressing" (1886)—oddly titled, given that no clothes are evident in the scene of naked kids in a hotly colored bourgeois interior—anticipates the mature Bonnard. And the amazing "Skeletons in the Studio" (1900), with a harmonic clutter of individually piquant items in a sun-washed room, calls so strongly to mind certain works by Matisse that it might dent, a little, one's appreciation of the Frenchman.

But weirdness proved to be destiny for Ensor. It is announced in the show by the peculiar identity of an enraptured connoisseur: "Skeleton Looking at Chinoiseries" (1885/1888). Why paint reality when irreality presents so many richer possibilities? Here he connected with deep traditions of his Northern Renaissance forebears Bosch and Brueghel. This orientation, outfitted with the visual inspirations that were ready to hand in the snazzy kitsch of his mother's shop, the extravagant local Mardi Gras, and popular broadsheet illustration, channelled his ambition and gave it tremendous propulsive force. All that was needed was a formal repertoire that would invest fantasy with the downrightness of fact.

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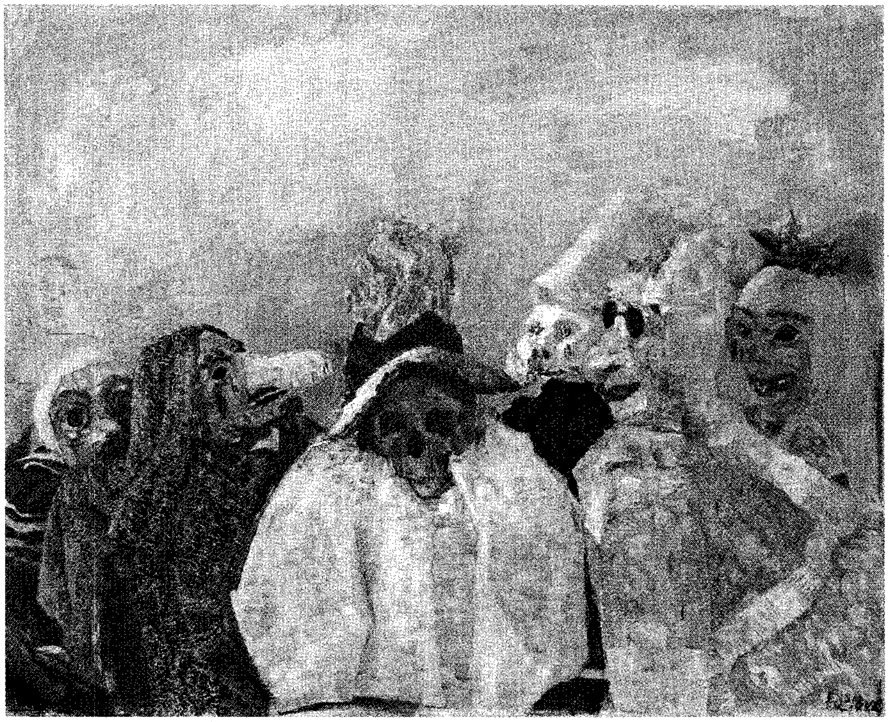

Ensor's "Masks Mocking Death (Masks Confronting Death)" (1888).

Ensor's breakthrough came, between 1885 and 1887, by way of drawing: big scenes (one is nearly seven feet high) from the life of Christ, done mainly in crayon. The subject is incidental to the technique. Ensor practiced varieties of line that alternately congeal into solid matter and, thinning, dissolve into light, with emphases ranging from shouts to whispers. This prepared him to be one of the foremost modern masters of etching, as in "Hop-Frog's Revenge" and the delectable "My Portrait in 1960" (1888)—as a skeleton. Assimilated to painting, the exercise fostered a prehensile feel for a oneness of figure and ground: foregrounds shoved back and backgrounds yanked forward, with unearthly light their unifying element. Ensor's best compositions register fully, with a bang, at first glance, leaving you to savor at your leisure their details of description and graces of execution. He strengthened the effect with dauby, greasy paint surfaces you can practically taste and smell.

Ensor was a far more substantial painter than Munch, though, I believe, a lesser artist. Munch's rushed crudities of style direct attention to the emotional urgency of his subjects, which pertain to specific experiences of life, love, anxiety, and death: modernity as an affliction of the heart. With Ensor, we sense psychological pressures too unbearable to be confronted except indirectly, by defensive means of mockery and rant. Not for nothing was he obsessed with masks. Another handicap is an occupational hazard of comedy: how quickly and utterly fashions in humor become dated. Ironies pertinent to clowns and masquerade have long since been fairly exhausted for us (unless drolly humanized, à la the Muppets). It would take a susceptible soul to reward the MOMA show with Ensor's strenuously sought response of laughter out loud. You had to be there, in a Belgium that the artist evoked with lyrical sarcasm in 1924: "Yes, our actions are pictorial, our inventions are enormous, our thoughts are tragicomical, our temptations are burlesque, our desires are born of the flatlands, our paradises are made of dough and condensed milk, and our endearments are made of butter." ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

TOMMY GUNS AND TOYS

"Public Enemies" and "Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen."

BY DAVID DENBY

Michael Mann's "Public Enemies" is a ravishing dream of violent gangster life in the thirties—not a tough, funny, and, finally, tragic dream like "Bonnie and Clyde" but a flowing, velvety fantasia of the crime wave that mesmerized the nation early in the decade. The scowling men in long dark coats and hats, led by the fashion-plate bandit John Dillinger (Johnny Depp), march into a grand Midwestern bank with marble floors and brass railings, take over the place, throw the cash in bags, and make their getaway, jumping onto the sideboards of flat-topped black Fords—beautiful cars with curved grilles and rounded headlights that stand straight up from the cars' bodies. It's the American poetry of crime. Throughout the movie, blazing tommy guns emit little spearheads of flame, just as in a comic book. Men get their skulls bashed with gun butts, and get thrown out of cars, but, despite all the violence, the movie is aesthetically shaped and slightly distanced by the pictorial verve of gangland effrontery—the public aggression that Mann makes inseparable from high style. He keeps the camera moving, and the editing (by Paul Rubell and Jeffrey Ford) reinforces the speed without jamming ragged fragments together in the manner of hack filmmaking. As a piece of direction, "Public Enemies" is often breathtakingly fast, but it's always lucid.

The high-definition digital images are crisply focussed, and much of the movie (in contrast to the usual shock-and-awe thunder of action films) is on the quiet side. Billie Holiday's plaintive tones show up on the soundtrack, a touch of melancholy high civilization amid the mayhem. Some of the dialogue is spoken sotto voce—in a darkened restaurant, say, or the back of a car, where suave hoods lean toward each other, exchanging confidences. Like Barry Levinson's "Bugsy," the picture happily exploits what movies can do to create a sinful nexus between criminality and elegance. Dillinger himself went to the movies on the last night of his life (an event re-created here); at times, he seemed to be modelling himself on the dapper William Powell. Most of the thugs, and the lawmen, too, dress in perfectly tailored suits and wear their pomaded hair swept back, like the grilles of those fast cars. There's almost an unspoken compact between director and audience in a movie like this, a compact of pleasure in everything looking so good. Twenty-five years ago, in "Miami Vice," Michael Mann brought visual glamour to television; he's still an incomparable maker of svelte, flawlessly integrated images.

Johnny Depp plays John Dillinger in Michael Mann's film.

ROBERT RISKO

Yet, for all its skill, "Public Enemies" is not quite a great movie. There's something missing—a sense of urgency and discovery, a more complicated narrative path, a shrewder, tougher sense of who John Dillinger is. The bank robber had a brief run as a national figure. Paroled after nearly nine years in the Indiana pen, on May 10, 1933, he rampaged his way around the country, often living openly in Chicago and smaller cities, and was shot dead by a variety of cops and agents fourteen months later, on July 22, 1934. As the movie tells it (Mann wrote the screenplay with Ronan Bennett and Ann Biderman, adapting Bryan Burrough's 2004 book, also called "Public Enemies"), Dillinger was a gentleman thug, loyal to his friends and to his hat-check girlfriend, Billie Frechette, played by Marion Cotillard with a combination of desperate hope and fear that is enormously appealing. Relaxed and assured, Depp, with his fine, sharply cut features and lithe body, turns Dillinger into a supremely confident young man. "What do you want?" Cotillard asks him. "Everything, right now," he says. It's the quintessential movie gangster's demand, although Depp speaks softly, without the snarling boastfulness of the great actors (Paul Muni, James Cagney, Edward G. Robinson) who played gangsters when Dillinger was alive. There's a faint tone of mockery in Depp's mildness, in his secret half smile, though his face can darken with rage. Mann and Depp's idea of Dillinger as an unruffled prince of crime is extremely enjoyable. Yet, as the movie goes on, you begin to question whether it makes much sense.

"Public Enemies" chronicles not only Dillinger's wild fourteen months but the parallel rise of organized crime (represented as an Italian gent in a dressing gown giving orders on the telephone) and also the development of a national crime-fighting force—a nascent F.B.I. Billy Crudup, who has done inventive work onstage in recent years, returns to the movies with a brilliant piece of high comedy. His cheekbones built up, his handsome features on the verge of disappearing into jowls, he plays the young but already insufferable J. Edgar Hoover as a bullying, righteous, and wary man, a natural-born populist authoritarian. One of Mann's wittiest accomplishments is to recapture the stiffly formal side of official life in the thirties, the pompous tone of bureaucracy and media, too—the sound of a newly powerful country trying to impress itself with its own importance. Special Agent Melvin Purvis (Christian Bale), whom Hoover puts in charge of the Dillinger hunt, acts out the role of a formidable national guardian. In the past, Bale's guttural delivery, as if his vocal chords were soaked daily in testosterone, never seemed anything but an actor's trick. He's a tight, dour, minimalist performer, not very likable. But he's effective here as a man driven by a single purpose—to see Dillinger dead, one way or another. Bale makes Purvis very still, very concentrated, the frightening embodiment of the Law.

Outgunned at first by the criminals, Purvis, with Hoover pretending not to notice, hires some trained killers from Oklahoma and Texas. The rival gangs of outlaws and "lawmen" duel back and forth, and the movie rushes through increasingly vicious gun battles and narrow escapes for Dillinger and his friends. Some of the shoot-outs—especially a mad nighttime pursuit of the irrepressibly gun-happy Baby Face Nelson (Stephen Graham)—are as flamboyant and as satisfying as a dream. But Mann, oddly, doesn't seem to take sides. In "Bonnie and Clyde," we were clearly meant to warm up to the outlaws—not just to the two lovers but to the entire group, who became an extended, quarrelling family, and also folk heroes, in a Depression-era country both bored and broke. But Dillinger's popularity is only hinted at in a couple of scenes, and Mann, as he did in "Heat," divides his admiration evenly between criminals and cops. Both are risking everything. The movie is structured around repeated scenes of wounded men (agents as well as criminals) dying as they look into the eyes of their friends. Yet some of the dying men are barely known to us, and the device, though beautifully staged in each case, doesn't have the power it should have had. The movie is emotionally neutered.

"Public Enemies" needed a charge of surprise, and I wish the filmmakers had more forcefully developed two ironies embedded in the material. For all of Hoover and Purvis's talk of "scientific methods," the new F.B.I. wins the war not by arresting criminals and sending them to prison but by massacring them. And Dillinger, as the movie readily shows, is deluded about himself. He embraces the future, but, actually, his time is over; the new crime syndicates dismiss him as a troublemaking fool. And although the screenplay keeps insisting that he's intelligent and shrewd, the movie demonstrates the opposite. The character doesn't quite add up. If he had been given a wild destructive streak, the conception might have made more sense, but Mann seems to trip over his own story by making Dillinger so self-contained and cool. The problem with casting a star as low-key and attractive as Johnny Depp is that you can't turn him into a man who is, at bottom, a loser.

"Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen," directed by the stunningly, almost viciously, untalented Michael Bay, is much closer to the norm of today's conglomerate filmmaking. Two sets of leaden-voiced, plastic-and-metal monsters, the Autobots and the Decepticons, having failed to settle their differences over a parking space on an alien planet, fight it out on Earth—with human beings, in the dubious form of the teen couple Shia LaBeouf and Megan Fox, in the middle. Apart from the frustrating truth that it's often impossible to tell the warring creatures apart—both sets are huge, black, gleaming, clanking, with many arms and appendages—they obey no rules that would make their combats a struggle of courage against limitation and therefore worth caring about. Achilles and Hector had spears and shields. These things can fly, climb, knock over walls, bore holes, change shape back into cars or trucks, dance the cancan in the pre-First World War Folies-Bergère. There isn't much they can't do, and their endless struggles are redundant and undifferentiated. The movie rages on for a hundred and fifty minutes and then just stops, pausing for the next sequel. In the middle of the battles, the American military, in the form of recruiting-poster scrambles in the Egyptian desert, joins the creatures in destroying the Pyramids and other temples, columns, and monoliths. It's all a rambunctious movie lark, of course, but if you were an Egyptian wouldn't you be a little annoyed by the casual imperial thwacking of sacred places? ♦

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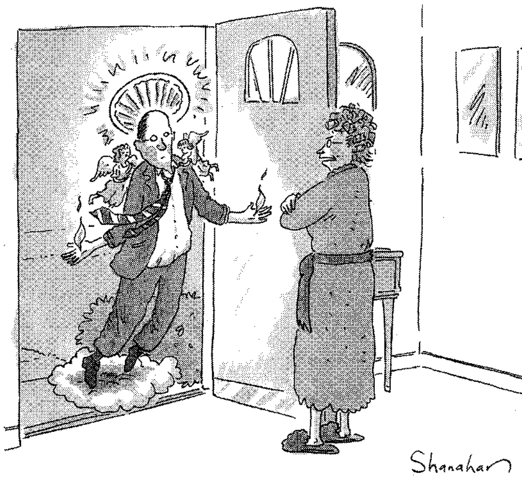
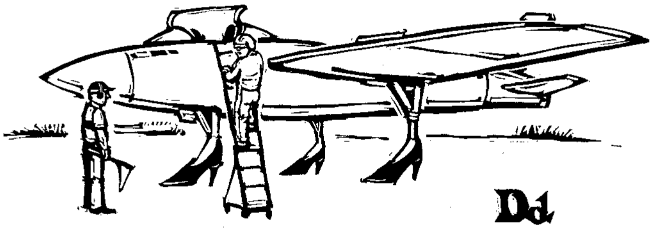
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Michael Crawford, must be received by Sunday, July 12th. Finalists in the June 22nd contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the July 27th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the U.S. or Canada (except Quebec) age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Which part of 'till death do us part' didn't you understand?"
Caroline Johnston Polisi
New York City



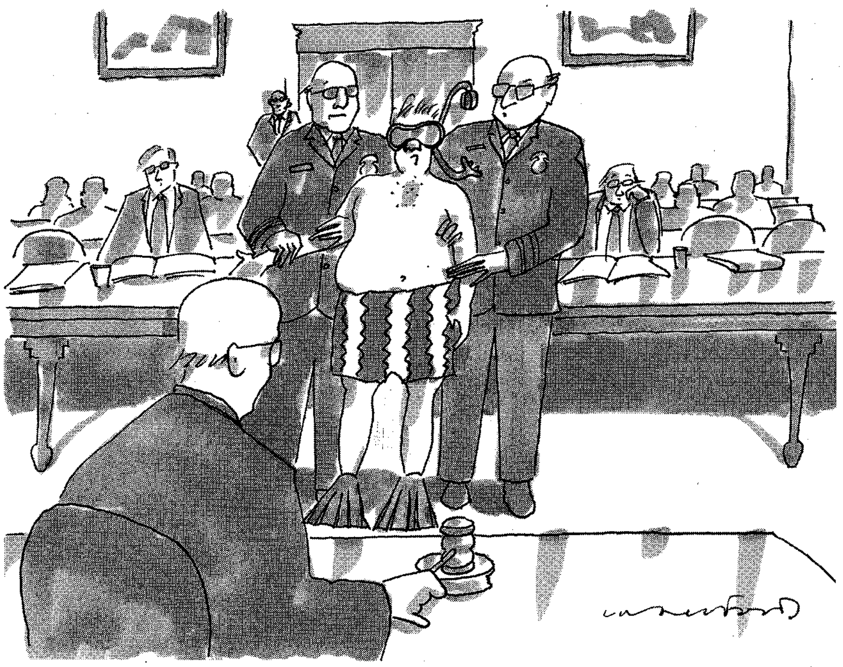
THE FINALISTS

"She thinks her bomb bay makes her look fat."
Eric Schares, Portland, Ore.

"It's a pretty good aircraft, except that it keeps nagging you to ask for directions."
Adam Pfeffer, Boca Raton, Fla.

"She's a lover, not a fighter."
Robert McLean, Tampa, Fla.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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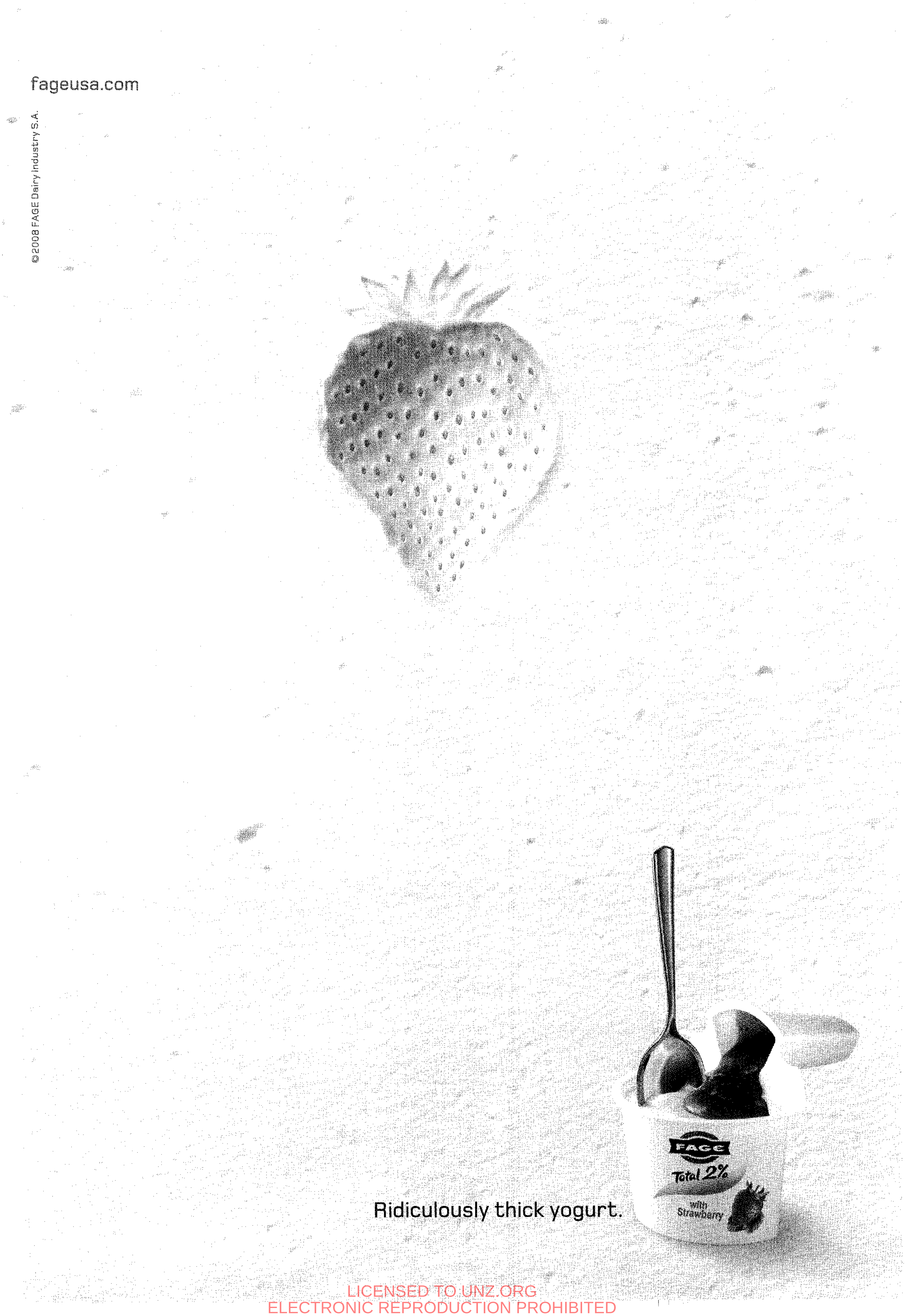
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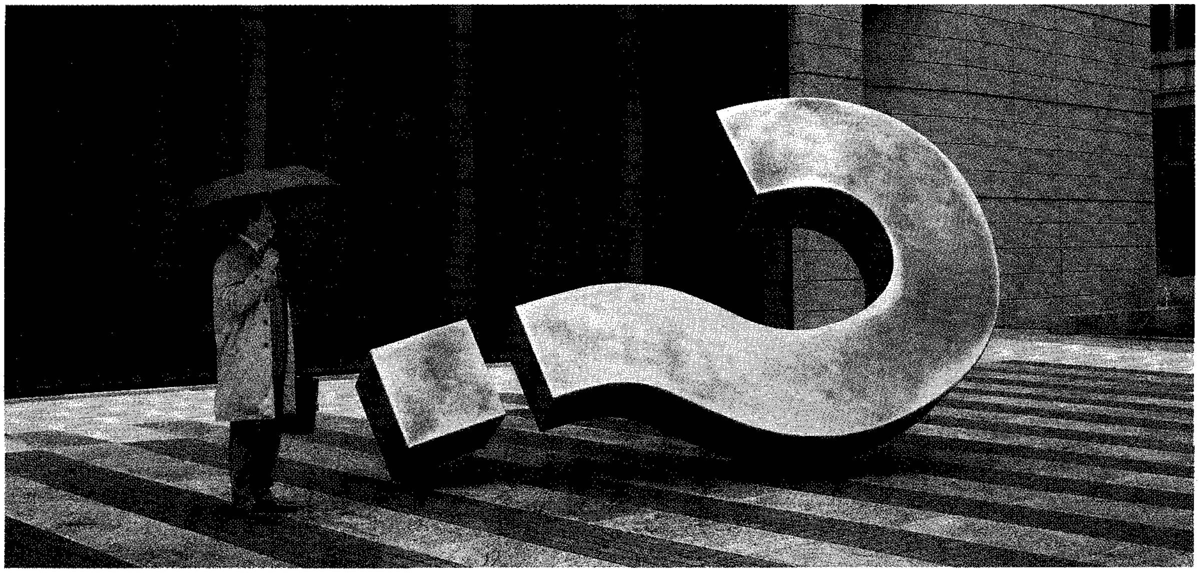

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